“I COULDN’T PUT IT DOWN.”

—**Ann Patchett**

“A profoundly moving reading experience.”

—***The Washington Post***

“UNFORGETTABLE.”

—**Tara Conklin**

“EXTRAORDINARY.”

—**Stephen King**

“MASTERFUL.”

—**Sandra Cisneros**

“This novel is a heart-stopping story of survival, danger, and love . . .”

—***The New York Times***

AMERICAN
DIRT
A NOVEL
Oprah's Book Club 2020
"A Grapes of Wrath for our times." —DON WINSLOW
JEANINE CUMMINS

“A DAZZLING ACCOMPLISHMENT.”

—**Julia Alvarez**

“One of the most anticipated novels of the season.”

—***Time*** **magazine**

“TRULY A REVELATION.”

—**Elin Hilderbrand**

AmericanDirt.com

FLATIRON BOOKS

VISIT…

LANZAROTE
Caliente.COM

PRICE $8.99

THE NEW YORKER

FEB. 10, 2020

TWO
U.S. PRESIDENTS

FEBRUARY 29, 2020
STERN AUDITORIUM / PERELMAN STAGE AT
CARNEGIE HALL

NYC'S
HOTTEST
TICKET

HISTORY PRESENTS
TALKS
HISTORY

Tickets available now at
www.history-talks.com

A CELEBRATION OF **HISTORY'S** 25TH ANNIVERSARY

Carnegiehall.org | CarnegieCharge 212-247-7800 | Box Office at 57th and Seventh

© 2020 A&E Television Networks, LLC. All rights reserved. 10866

THE
NEW YORKER

FEBRUARY 10, 2020

4 GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN
13 THE TALK OF THE TOWN
Amy Davidson Sorkin on the impeachment trial; the "Oscar" time forgot; Trumpists at the racetrack; Caro in Chinese; the eye-opening art of the Residents.

LIFE AND LETTERS

Alexandra Schwartz 18 Look Again
The unsparing eye of Vivian Gornick.

SHOUTS & MURMURS

Ian Frazier 23 Etymology of Some Common Typos

DEPT. OF FINANCE

John Cassidy 24 Steady State
Challenging the wisdom of economic growth.

A REPORTER AT LARGE

Paige Williams 28 A Deadly Mistake
Should an overdose be prosecuted as a homicide?

ANNALS OF COVERT ACTION

Adam Entous and Evan Osnos 40 Last Man Standing
The rise of "targeted killing" as foreign policy.

SKETCHBOOK

Edward Steed 52 "A Nation Divided"

FICTION

Anthony Veasna So 54 "Three Women of Chuck's Donuts"

THE CRITICS

ON STAGE

Hilton Als 63 *The shaky comeback of Louis C.K.*

BOOKS

65 Briefly Noted
Adam Gopnik 66 *The Republican reformers flanking Lincoln.*

MUSICAL EVENTS

Alex Ross 70 *Manfred Honeck reinvigorates the repertoire.*

THE THEATRE

Vinson Cunningham 72 *"Medea," "Mac Beth."*

POEMS

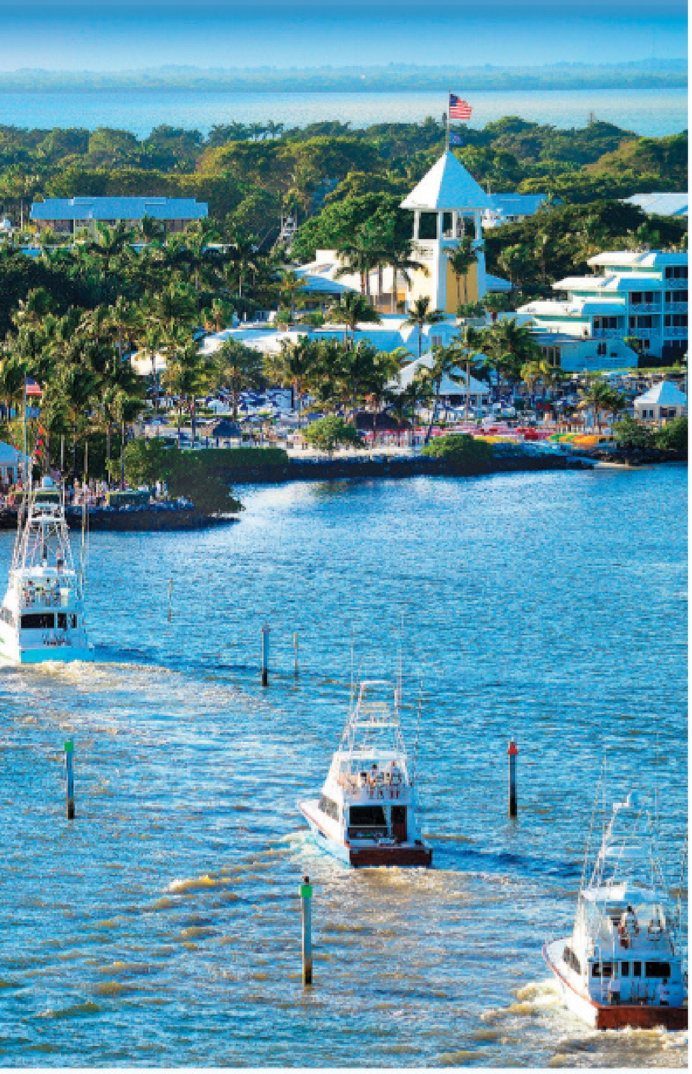
Annelyse Gelman 33 "Boy"
Wyn Cooper 58 "I Trust the Wind and Don't Know Why"

COVER

Malika Favre "Behind the Lens"

DRAWINGS *Sam Gross, Emily Bernstein, Michael Maslin, Mike Twohy, Jeremy Nguyen, Jason Adam Katzenstein, Roz Chast, Liana Finck, Emily Flake, Lila Ash, Edward Koren, Benjamin Schwartz* SPOTS *Serge Bloch*

Our Members return each year as faithfully as the tides.



Situated on 2,500 acres of unspoiled paradise, Ocean Reef provides a long list of unsurpassed amenities to its Members including a 175-slip marina, two 18-hole golf courses, tennis facilities, state-of-the-art medical center, K-8 school, private airport and more.

There are only two ways to experience Ocean Reef Club's Unique Way of Life – as a guest of a Member or through the pages of *Living* magazine. Visit **OceanReefClubLiving.com** or call 305.367.5921 to request your complimentary copy.

OCEAN REEF CLUB®
A UNIQUE WAY OF LIFE
KEY LARGO, FLORIDA

CONTRIBUTORS

Paige Williams (*"A Deadly Mistake," p. 28*) is a staff writer and the Laventhol/Newsday visiting associate professor at Columbia's Journalism School.

Adam Entous (*"Last Man Standing," p. 40*) became a staff writer in 2018. Previously, he was a member of a team at the Washington *Post* that won the Pulitzer Prize for national reporting.

John Cassidy (*"Steady State," p. 24*) has been a staff writer since 1995 and writes a column for newyorker.com. He is the author of "How Markets Fail: The Logic of Economic Calamities."

Malika Favre (*Cover*) is an illustrator who lives in London and Barcelona. This is her tenth cover for *The New Yorker*.

Wyn Cooper (*Poem, p. 58*) has published five books of poetry, including, most recently, "Mars Poetica."

Sarah Larson (*The Talk of the Town, p. 17*) is a staff writer. Her column, Podcast Dept., appears on newyorker.com.

Evan Osnos (*"Last Man Standing," p. 40*) writes about politics and foreign affairs for the magazine. His book on China, "Age of Ambition," won the 2014 National Book Award for nonfiction.

Alexandra Schwartz (*"Look Again," p. 18*) joined *The New Yorker* in 2013 and has been a staff writer since 2016.

Anthony Veasna So (*Fiction, p. 54*) is an M.F.A. candidate at Syracuse University. He is at work on a novel and a collection of stories.

Annelyse Gelman (*Poem, p. 33*) is the author of the poetry collection "Everyone I Love Is a Stranger to Someone." Her collaborative EP, "About Repulsion," was released in 2019.

Hilton Als (*On Stage, p. 63*) won the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for criticism. He is an associate professor of writing at Columbia University.

Dana Goodyear (*The Talk of the Town, p. 14*) is a staff writer who is based in California.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

ANNALS OF INQUIRY
Exactly how safe is football? Ingfei Chen reports on the challenges of assessing the game's risks.

PHOTO BOOTH
Coralie Kraft on Henk Wildschut's photographs of the plants that make refugee camps feel more like home.

Download the New Yorker Today app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week's magazine and all issues back to 2008.

LEFT: JEREMY LEUNG; RIGHT: PHOTOGRAPH BY HENK WILDSCHUT

THE MAIL

SURVIVING ABUSE

Brittany Smith's case, as portrayed in Elizabeth Flock's powerful article about abused women and the Stand Your Ground defense, demonstrates that, despite increased awareness of gender-based violence, more work must be done to address the public perception of the problem ("A Violent Defense," January 20th). It may seem as if Smith's case arose solely out of a familiar cycle of violence and impunity, and of women not reporting abuse. Yet, as Flock makes clear, this seemingly simple cycle is in fact a more complicated and nuanced phenomenon, owing to the burying of evidence. This can involve hiding the abuser's past behavior toward the survivor and others, and unfairly classifying injuries from abuse. Flock's ostensibly small observations reveal a different story than we may be accustomed to hearing.

In order to combat the prevailing view of violence against women, we must look more critically at isolated, inept police bureaucracies; incompetent defense attorneys; and a society that pathologizes and punishes victims of assault. I hope Flock's article spurs people not only to rally for justice for Smith but also to push for structural change, so that women are not unjustly imprisoned for defending themselves after being nearly killed.

Kathleen R. Arnold
Chicago, Ill.

In my U.S. history class, we discussed Virginia's recent vote to approve the Equal Rights Amendment, which symbolically provided the final ratification needed to amend the Constitution. I found this important historical moment jarring when considered alongside Flock's report, which made me feel as though I were reading about a different United States altogether. Alabama's law-enforcement and judicial systems have failed Brittany Smith in every way. After being raped, she was treated as a perpetrator. Only her family and a few friends believed her account of what had occurred; everyone else defended her violent attacker or simply refused to accept the evidence.

As a young woman in high school, I am told that I have more rights than the women who came before me. Smith's story, however, makes me think otherwise.

Talia Winiarsky
New York City

LAND OF OPPORTUNITY?

Louis Menand, in his informative piece on affirmative action, might have added that, for centuries, the United States has had something akin to affirmative action for white people (Books, January 20th). As was highlighted on the excellent podcast "Seeing White," many of these measures have had to do with landownership. In 1618, the headright system enticed Europeans to settle in Virginia in exchange for land, and the Homestead Act of 1862 provided land in the West, benefitting whites disproportionately. The story was not much different in the mid-twentieth century. For example, in the nineteen-thirties, forties, and fifties, the Federal Housing Authority gave mortgage loans to homeowners in predominantly white communities; it is estimated that less than two per cent of the loans went to African-Americans. Menand closes his piece by asking if white liberals "believe that there should be no sacrifice to make or price to pay for the systematic damage done to the lives of millions of American citizens and the men and women who are their ancestors." It is important for white people to understand that this damage happened in more ways than many of us realize.

Harvey Teres
Syracuse, N.Y.

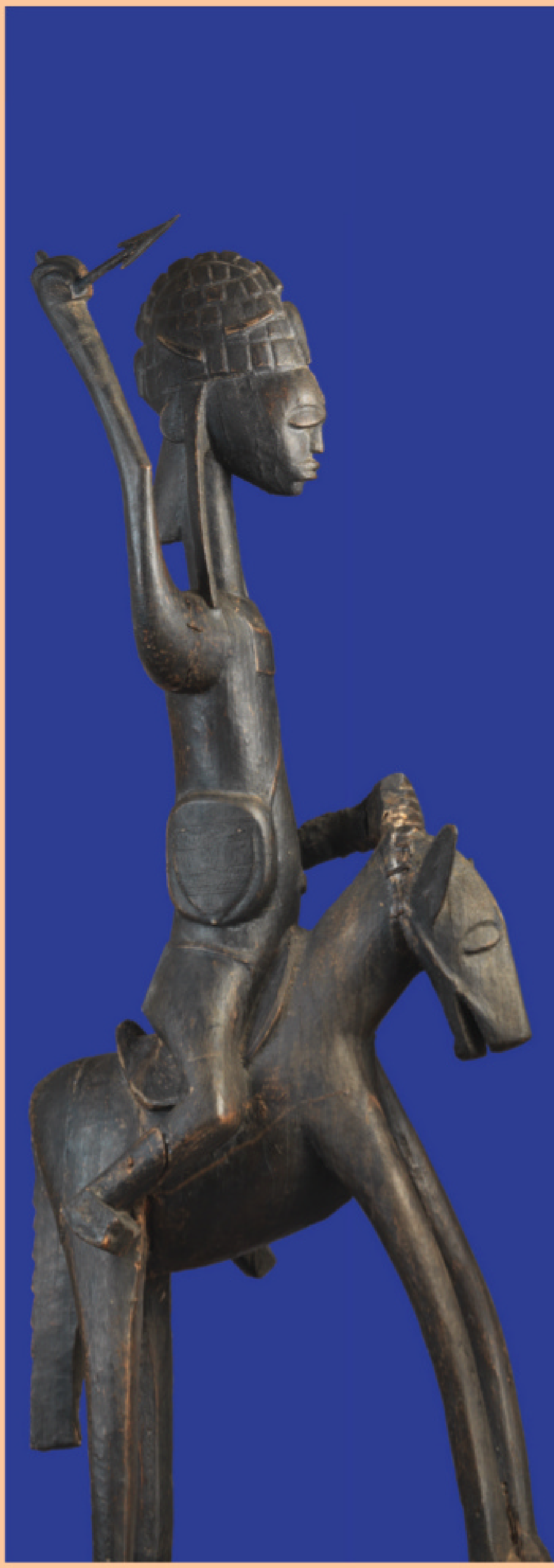
•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. We regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

THE MET 150

Sahel

ART AND EMPIRES ON THE SHORES OF THE SAHARA



Through May 10
metmuseum.org
#MetSahel

The exhibition is made possible by the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund, the Diane W. and James E. Burke Fund, The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, Laura G. & James J. Ross, and The International Council of The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Equestrian, 19th–20th century. Bamana peoples. Mali, Ouassabo, Bougouni District. Private collection.

FEBRUARY 5 – 11, 2020

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The playwright Lauren Yee has a disarming way of probing political trauma; her play "The Great Leap" explored China's Cultural Revolution through basketball. Her latest, **"Cambodian Rock Band"**—directed by Chay Yew, starting previews on Feb. 4, at the Pershing Square Signature Center—is the first work in Yee's Signature Theatre residency. The story, of a father and a daughter grappling with the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, is told through live rock music, including songs by the psychedelic-pop group Dengue Fever.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LANDON NORDEMAN

NIGHT LIFE

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Isaac Mizrahi
Café Carlyle

After watching Isaac Mizrahi commandeer a club with his uncensored wit, endearing charm, and from-the-heart vocalizing, you might imagine that designing clothes was a second-choice career for him. His latest residency, "Movie Stars and Supermodels," now in its third and final week, finds him throwing shade at the aforementioned—among other deserving subjects—while leaving room for choice material by the likes of Stephen Sondheim, Cy Coleman, and Bill Withers.—*Steve Futterman (Feb. 4-8.)*

Rafiq Bhatia
National Sawdust

On his newly released "Standards Vol. 1" EP, Rafiq Bhatia (the guitarist in the art-rock trio Son Lux) realigns classics by Duke Ellington and Ornette Coleman, rooting out the anxiety lurking within those well-trodden melodies. Even the opener, "In a Sentimental Mood," borders on the dystopian, pointedly betraying its title. If the songs belong to the previous American century, their nervous and distrustful mood feels all too part of the current one. For this release concert, Bhatia is joined by the jazz vocalist Vuyo Sotashe and the pianist Chris Pattishall.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Feb. 5.)*

Dee Dee Bridgewater
Blue Note

There's little that the vocalist Dee Dee Bridgewater can't wrap her inclusive sensibilities around. On her most recent album, "Memphis . . . Yes, I'm Ready," the venerated performer takes on R. & B. and gospel material associated with the Southern region she originally called home. True to form, the ever-game Bridgewater grabs this repertoire by the throat and doesn't let go until it gleefully surrenders to her ardor.—*S.F. (Feb. 5-9.)*

Dweller
Various locations

The second edition of Dweller, a festival spotlighting black electronic artists and d.j.s, expands to three locations (it began last year, at Brooklyn's Bossa Nova Civic Club) and offers a far larger lineup, featuring more out-of-towners. One standout is DJ Stingray, from Detroit, who spins electro at a lightning pace and with off-the-charts dexterity; he plays Nowadays on Saturday. The next afternoon, at the same venue, Titonton Duvanté, an Ohio native now living in Brooklyn, brings his wry, brainy approach to techno to the decks.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Feb. 5-9.)*

Corey Harris
Symphony Space

According to some misbegotten tradition, a bluesman must die—preferably penniless, ideally unheard—before he can be designated a genius. The singer and guitarist Corey Harris took a more expeditious route, nabbing a MacArthur Fellowship in 2007. With a background that winds through Colorado and Bates College, Harris steers away from mimicking old-time grit; rather, he gently tweaks the music, interjecting sounds gleaned from the Caribbean, Mali, and beyond as he molds his blues from the diaspora as well as the Delta.—*J.R. (Feb. 6.)*

Rapsody
Elsewhere

Rapsody—a Grammy-nominated rapper with a gift for gut-wrenching lyricism—is destined to leave a legacy. Even so, she's made sure to credit the women who came before her. Her album "Eve," from last year, is a tribute to her inspirations that also examines the erasure and the trauma that black women have faced throughout history; it hits deepest on "Afeni," a track named for the mother of the late rapper Tupac Shakur. Referencing his song "Keep Ya Head Up," Rapsody urges, "At least love your woman / we the closest thing to God."—*Julyssa Lopez (Feb. 6.)*

Eclair Fifi
Elsewhere

The Edinburgh native Eclair Fifi is a house d.j. in the loosest sense; as she once put it, "I don't see a difference in the genres, and I'm not a purist about it." She's not kidding. Recently, Fifi finished off an episode of her show for the London-based station NTS Radio by segueing the gibbering footwork of Traxxman into eighties-style synth goth from Zinno—and made it sound utterly inevitable.—*M.M. (Feb. 7.)*

Michael Kiwanuka
Terminal 5

Michael Kiwanuka gave his third album his last name. It may not seem like a hugely significant detail, but, as one dives deeper into his maze of retro-inspired funk, soul, and psychedelic rock, the British singer's intentions become clear: he's celebrating his identity as both an artist and the son of Ugandan immigrants. As he grapples with our era's uncertainty and violence, he works through his pain on songs such as "Rolling" and "You Ain't the Problem" without losing his electric, unrestrained sound.—*J.L. (Feb. 8.)*

KIRBY
Rough Trade NYC

In February of 2016, the singer KIRBY uploaded a single track, a slow burn titled "Loved by You," that offered but a snapshot of the sheer power of her voice. Then she disappeared back into the ether of the Internet for nearly two years, before reëmerging with the soaring, gospel-infused "Vain." It wasn't until this past August that a third song—the sugary-sweet "Kool-Aid"—appeared, followed by another in October and another last month. This week, her début EP, "Sis," makes good on every bit of the promise of those releases, showcasing a versatile and stunning vocalist through multihued soul.—*Briana Younger (Feb. 11.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Argento New Music Project
Austrian Cultural Forum

"Double Take," the latest offering by the Argento New Music Project, examines the

INDIE POP

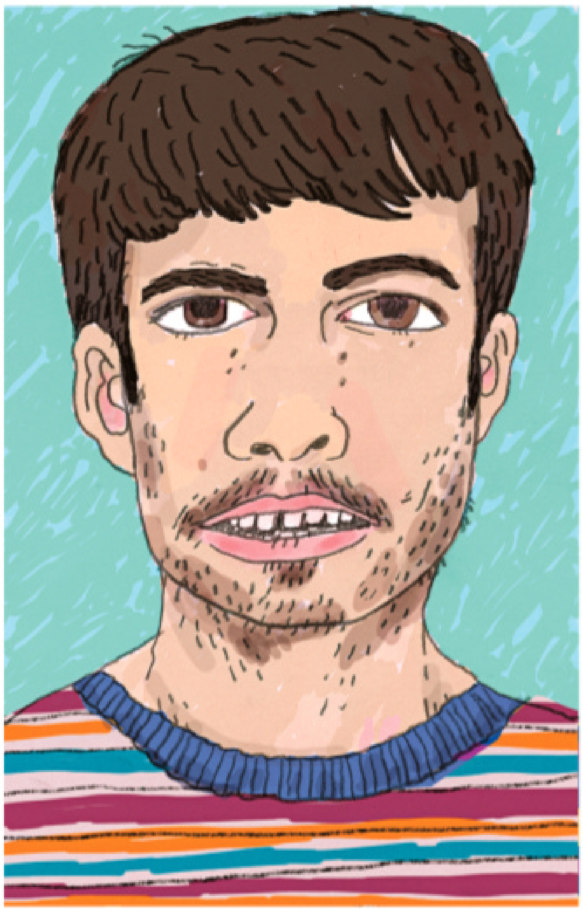


ILLUSTRATION BY MARK TODD

Everything about **Rex Orange County**—his uniquely tender voice, the lightheartedness of his production, the endearing naïveté in his lyrics—stands in stark contrast to the general sentiment of the present moment. The British singer, whose yearning songs have travelled from his bedroom (via SoundCloud) to the world, has come to be known for his sincerity, whether in cheer or, occasionally, in angst. On his latest album, "Pony," he has the demeanor of a doe-eyed romantic, writing love letters to his girlfriend and drinking in the changes that success has brought to his life. In a world filled with jaded cynics, Rex Orange County—who performs at Radio City Music Hall, Feb. 7-8—manages to evoke a welcome sense of optimism and childlike wonder.—*Briana Younger* notion of duality from varying perspectives. To open the concert, the vocalist Charmaine Lee and the clarinettist Carol McGonnell match extraordinary technique with lightning-fast reflexes in structured improvisation. Schoenberg's thrice-familiar "Verklärte Nacht" is contrasted with an earlier germinal sketch, "Toter Winkel," and Erin Gee's "Mouthpiece 29," from 2016, precedes the world première of a new elaboration, "Mouthpiece 29b."—*Steve Smith (Feb. 5 at 7.)*

"In C"

Le Poisson Rouge

The appeal of "In C," the watershed 1964 minimalist work by Terry Riley, is not just its ecstatic repetitions but also its radical inclusiveness: the composition is open to literally any musician able to navigate its fifty-three brief melodic cells and willing to bend to an ensemble's collective will. Here, the sixteenth annual presentation of the piece by the nomadic curators of "Darmstadt: Classics of the Avant-Garde" brings together thirty prominent musicians from New York's contemporary-classical, jazz, and experimental-music scenes.—*S.S. (Feb. 5 at 7:30.)*

Doric String Quartet

Weill Recital Hall

Last week, New York held the local première of the Australian composer Brett Dean's Cello Concerto. Now here's a chance to be among the first listeners Stateside to hear Dean's String Quartet No. 3, subtitled "Hidden Agendas" and inspired by our polarized, extremely online age. The Doric String Quartet, the refined and expressive British ensemble for whom the piece was written, performs it alongside standard works by Haydn and Schubert.—*S.S. (Feb. 6 at 7:30.)*

"Agrippina"

Metropolitan Opera House

As Caligula's sister and Nero's mother, the Roman empress Agrippina occupies an especially salacious chapter of ancient history, but Handel's opera uses the shifting personal and political alliances of her story as an occasion for pliant melodies and even some comedy. David McVicar's production, which has appeared in Brussels and London, comes to the Met with Joyce DiDonato, Kate Lindsey, Brenda Rae, Iestyn Davies, and Matthew Rose; Harry Bicket conducts. Also playing: Berlioz conceived "La Damnation de Faust," a work of swirling musical imagination, as a concert piece, and the Met, owing to unexpected technical difficulties in reviving Robert Lepage's imaginative 2008 production, presents it in its intended form. Even without Lepage's chimerical tableaux, the company has assembled a first-rate cast, including Elīna Garanča, Ildar Abdrazakov, and Bryan Hymel, who made a name for himself earlier in his career with Berlioz's grand "Les Troyens"; Edward Gardner conducts. (Feb. 8 at 1.) Andrea Bocelli returns to the Met stage with a concert of arias and scenes from Italian opera (Feb. 10 at 7:30).—*Oussama Zahr (Feb. 6 at 7:30 and Feb. 9 at 3.)*

Caroline Shaw

Miller Theatre

Few composers seem to revel quite as joyfully in the limitless possibilities of music-making as Caroline Shaw. An accomplished singer and violinist, Shaw became the youngest winner of the Pulitzer Prize for music in 2013, portrayed herself on the Amazon comedy series "Mozart in the Jungle," and has collaborated with Kanye West. Her "Composer Portrait" concert features two ensembles with which she shares solid working connections, Attacca Quartet and Sō Percussion.—*S.S. (Feb. 6 at 8.)*

Danish String Quartet

Alice Tully Hall

In two volumes of a series titled "Prism," released by ECM Records, the Danish String Quartet has established itself as a force to be reckoned with, taking on Beethoven's enigmatic, expressive late works and contextualizing them with pieces by forebears and followers. Here, in a six-concert series presented by the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the ensemble plays the composer's sixteen quartets in the order they were written, with emphasis on continuity and evolution.—*S.S. (Feb. 7 at 7:30, Feb. 9 at 5, and Feb. 11 at 7:30.)*

"The Mother of Us All"

Metropolitan Museum

The Met Museum's American Wing preserves the façade of Martin E. Thompson's Branch Bank of the United States, whose neoclassical style echoes the stately entrance of the White House. Against this backdrop, Juilliard and the New York Philharmonic stage Virgil Thomson and Gertrude Stein's second operatic collaboration, "The Mother of Us All," a portrait of the suffragette Susan B. Anthony painted in splashes of musical Americana; Louisa Proske directs, and Daniela Candillari conducts. Throughout the week, the Philharmonic continues to celebrate the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, with world premières by female composers, including Nina C. Young (Feb. 5-11, David Geffen Hall) and Paola Prestini, Joan La Barbara, and Nicole Lizée (Feb. 10, Appel Room).—*O.Z. (Feb. 8, Feb. 11-12, and Feb. 14 at 7.)*

John McCowen

Issue Project Room

The Brooklyn-based clarinettist John McCowen views his instrument as an "acoustic synthesizer," focussing intently on the pris-

---

IN CONCERT

PHOTOGRAPH BY RENATO TOPPO / THE NADIA REISENBERG/CLARA ROCKMORE FOUNDATION

Whether you first encountered the theremin in Miklós Rózsa's score for Hitchcock's "Spellbound," in "Good Vibrations" by the Beach Boys, or in one of countless science-fiction B-movie soundtracks, you never forget the eerie wail this early electronic instrument produces when human hands are waved near its metal antennas. **"100 Years of Theremin,"** presented by Ambient Church at Bushwick United Methodist Parish, on Feb. 8, features video projections mapped to the venue's contours and includes a tribute to Clara Rockmore (pictured above, circa 1930)—the former violinist who became the instrument's most disciplined devotee and visible advocate—alongside performances by the virtuoso soloist Dorit Chrysler, the New York Theremin Society Orchestra, and other special guests.—*Steve Smith* matic aural phenomena that result from playing long-form drones with tiny variances of inflection. However austere his approach may seem, the results teem with the sonic equivalent of microscopic life viewed on a slide. In the first concert of his Issue Project Room artist residency, he concentrates exclusively on the Stygian rumble of the contrabass clarinet, a beast seldom encountered outside of high-school band halls.—*S.S. (Feb. 8 at 8.)*

IN THE MUSEUMS

The oldest known still-lifes are ancient Egyptian—frescoes of figs for the afterlife. The Assyrians carved pomegranates from ivory. And so it continues, from Caravaggio's grapes to Cézanne's apples. In the mid-twentieth century, produce became a material, not just a subject. In 1962, the Fluxus artist Alison Knowles wrote a simple score for a performance: "Make a Salad." The greens can serve dozens or hundreds. On the eighth floor of the Whitney (through Feb. 17), you can see your art and eat it, too, in "Fruits, Vegetables: Fruit and Vegetable Salad," a variable installation by the sharp-witted New York Conceptualist **Darren Bader.** (The museum acquired the undated piece in 2015.) Forty pedestals are topped with a visually striking variety of edible readymades, which on a recent visit included a kumquat, an artichoke, rainbow chard, an aloe leaf, and a pineapple. Every two days (before they spoil), the sculptures transubstantiate into ingredients when Tyler Montana and his team from the nearby restaurant Untitled chop them into a superbly weird salad. Food for thought.—*Andrea K. Scott*

Maxim Vengerov
Carnegie Hall

Maxim Vengerov, a violinist of heightened yet subtle emotionalism, accompanied by the pianist Polina Osetinskaya, begins this concert with the contented declarations of Mozart's Violin Sonata in B-Flat Major. The program plumbs the expressive depths of Schubert's Fantasy in C Major, Ravel's "Tzigane," and Richard Strauss's Violin Sonata in E-Flat Major, which, much like his operas, bursts with lyrical flights. Also playing: Bernard Labadie guides the Orchestra of St. Luke's through vibrant thickets of sound in pieces for double orchestra by Handel and Vivaldi (Feb. 6 at 8).—*O.Z. (Feb. 11 at 8.)*

ART

Noah Davis
Zwirner

CHELSEA Davis, who died of cancer, in 2015, at the age of thirty-two, was both a gifted painter and a co-founder (with his wife, Karon Davis) of the Underground Museum, a unique institution situated in a diverse, working-class neighborhood in L.A. The canvases in this retrospective-size show, thoughtfully curated by Helen Molesworth, share affinities with the supersaturated works of Kerry James Marshall, both in their depictions of African-American life (a swimming-pool scene is especially winning) and in their surreal, sometimes desolate compositions (ballerinas form two lines outside an apartment complex at night; a hunter pursues his extraterrestrial prey). In its lush abbreviations of form, Davis's work can also evoke Fairfield Porter. One room of the show—moodily lit, with burning incense—features the lyrical mixed-media sculptures of the artist's widow; the acerbic photo-based works of his brother, Kahlil Joseph; and models of the Underground Museum's exhibitions. This contemplative space, in combination with Davis's extravagantly beautiful paintings, skillfully conveys the uncommon breadth of his vision.—*Johanna Fateman (Through Feb. 22.)*

Whitney Hubbs
Situations

DOWNTOWN In this riddlelike show, "Animal, Hole, Selfie," three big black-and-white photographs each represent a category named in the title. There is a gentle-looking horse (captured from above), the seductively mysterious mouth of an underwater cave, and a cropped, nude self-portrait of the artist reflected in the triangular shard of a full-length mirror. The neat, if facetious, semiotic system that Hubbs proposes in this trio of works collapses in her small color contact prints. Taped helter-skelter to a mirror hanging on one of the gallery's walls, these improvised vignettes feature the artist in an array of low-budget, festishy getups and erotic predicaments, with props as diverse as duct tape, peacock feathers, cinder blocks, and a watermelon.—*J.F. (Through Feb. 16.)*

Sandy Skoglund
Ryan Lee

CHELSEA This veteran American artist's new installation "Winter" transforms the gallery into a surreal periwinkle tableau: statues of owls, the figure of an icy nymph, snowdrifts made from crumpled paper, and giant snowflakes. The installation continues Skoglund's long-standing tradition of staging elaborate environments of high artifice, which she then photographs. Her latest monochrome fantasyland fulfills its dramatic potential in a single picture on the wall: a vigilant little girl stands in a far corner of the installation with a distracted man and woman, her red hair a striking contrast to the blue environment. Another section of the show is devoted to delightful examples of Skoglund's earlier work, including two images, from 1979, set in eerily white rooms. One is dotted with blue and red plastic spoons; the other is punctuated by colorfully striped paper plates. Both images are as playful as they are exacting.—*J.F. (Through March 7.)*

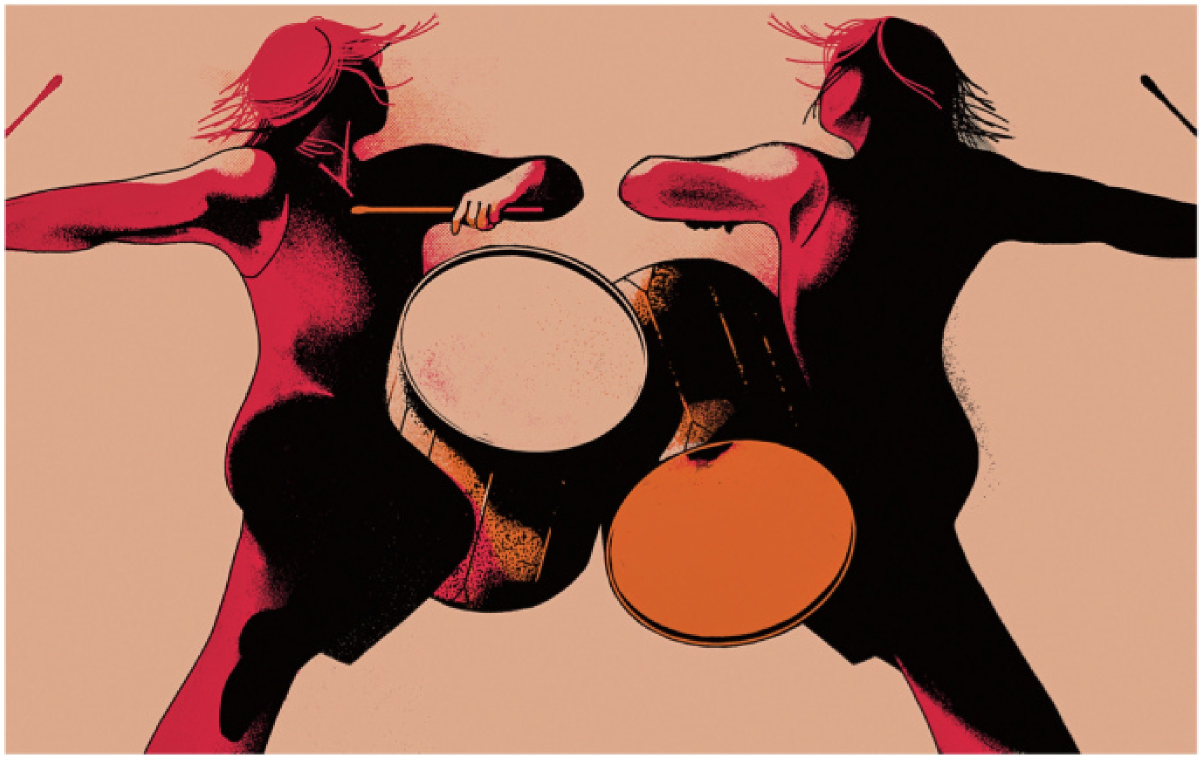
DANCE

New York City Ballet
David H. Koch

"Haieff Divertimento," from 1947, is one of George Balanchine's high-spirited ballets, driven by a frisky score and brimming with suggestions of social dance. It is also a rarity, last seen here in a 1994 revival led by Wendy

ILLUSTRATION BY GAIA STELLA

ARGENTINE DANCE



The men of **Che Malambo** charge like a stampede and dance like cowboys—the Argentine kind. Malambo, a centuries-old gaucho style, is competitive and macho. Heads and torsos ride haughtily over legs that buck, twist, and beat out rhythms, often ostentatiously on the rims of boots. Drums slung over shoulders sometimes take up the beat, as do *boleadoras*, weights attached to ropes that are thrown to ensnare cattle on the run. These tools, swung like lassos or jump ropes or yo-yos, are visually spectacular musical instruments, whipping the air and striking the ground. Imagine a stage full of those whirring implements, some held between teeth, and you get a sense of why the roars of this troupe of twelve sexy, sweaty guys, directed by the French choreographer Gilles Brinas, are usually answered by whoops. They gallop into the Joyce Theatre Feb. 11-16.—*Brian Seibert*

Whelan, now the company's associate artistic director. This week, and through the end of the season, it will be performed in a program ("Classic NYCB I") that includes two additional rarities: Jerome Robbins's 1982 trio "Concertino" and a male solo from Balanchine's "Episodes" (1959), originally created for none other than Paul Taylor. Balanchine said that the solo was meant to bring to mind a bug struggling in a glass of milk. On Feb. 6 and Feb. 9, it will be performed by the luminous Paul Taylor dancer Michael Trusnovec; the remaining performances will be by Jovani Furlan, who learned the solo from the last City Ballet dancer to work on it with Taylor, Peter Frame.—*Marina Harss (Through March 1.)*

Deborah Colker
Joyce Theatre

In "Cão Sem Plumas" ("Dog Without Feathers"), the prominent Rio-based Companhia de Dança Deborah Colker takes a trip to northeastern Brazil, along the Capibaribe River. The region appears glamorously in black-and-white film, directed by Colker and Cláudio Assis: cracked riverbeds, burning cane fields, and mangrove swamps, all ornamented with mud-caked dancers. Onstage, in mud-patterned unitards, the dancers move acrobatically but stick close to the ground, as if only half emerged from a state of nature. In a meandering travelogue of images, they take on aspects of herons, mangrove trees, a giant crab.—*Brian Seibert (Feb. 4-9.)*

Gabrielle Lamb
Gerald W. Lynch Theatre

A rising choreographer already laden with awards and commissions from regional troupes, Gabrielle Lamb has yet to make a commensurate impression with her own company, Pigeonwing Dance. Her latest piece, "Plexus: a work in knots," extends her interest in interdependence and interlocking formations. To a chiming score by James Budinich, the dancers get tangled not only in one another's limbs but also in bright-green cords, which they occasionally unspool from their mouths in the manner of Martha Graham's "Cave of the Heart."—*B.S. (Feb. 7.)*

"Fashion's Modern Muse"
The Museum at F.I.T.

The links between ballet and fashion are many: both depend on the young and the lithe, both emphasize accessorizing and presenting the body. Both, too, embrace chic, nostalgia, and the glorification of the foot. The conversation between the two forms is rich fodder for the fascinating exhibit "Ballerina: Fashion's Modern Muse." The tutu, particularly the long, full Romantic tutu—think "Giselle" rather than "Swan Lake"—has inspired countless evening gowns by designers from Coco Chanel to Pierre Balmain and Christian Dior. So, too, has the point shoe, represented here in various fetishistic reinterpretations by Christian Louboutin, Noritaka Tatehana, and others. The exhibit also examines the phenomenon of the ballerina as fashion icon in a section devoted to the wardrobe of Margot Fonteyn, the British ballerina who came to symbolize elegance and poise in mid-century London.—*M.H. (Feb. 11-April 18.)*

THE THEATRE

The Confession of Lily Dare
Cherry Lane

This zinging, swinging new work, an homage to Old Hollywood movies, written by Charles Busch and directed by Carl Andress for Primary Stages, is best experienced with a group of willing laughers, and, preferably, one or two close friends. Once the laughs get going, there's no stopping them; no matter how cheaply they're won—some of these gags are banana-peel slips of pandering fun—you might as well surrender. Busch plays Lily Dare, an orphan who rushes through an unbelievably busy time line of a life—earthquake victim, cabaret singer, inmate, famous madam, and on and on—as she nurses her secret of a long-lost daughter. Jennifer Van Dyck plays several characters, including Lily's daughter, Lily's aunt, and an undercover cop, all hilariously. You might be tempted to call this camp—that's the word most often used in association with Busch—but it's a hell of a weird, subtly dark good time, and a tutorial on the workings of melodrama.—*Vinson Cunningham (Through March 5.)*

Grand Horizons
Hayes

Bess Wohl writes fluid comedies that are like sitcoms in tone and structure but hide a kernel of darkness within. Her latest, "Grand Horizons," is her Broadway début and works just fine as a specimen of her style. Bill (James Cromwell) and Nancy (Jane Alexander) are senior citizens tucked away in a gated community, yet they muster the energy to divorce. Their sons, Ben (Ben McKenzie) and Brian (Michael Urie), descend on the house in a confused fury—is the split the result of somebody's oncoming dementia? The play, directed by Leigh Silverman for Second Stage, is a comic machine: there's a laugh a minute, and the actors, especially Alexander and Urie, milk quiet moments for a few more. But the best bit of the show is one that's purely theatrical—something goes boom. The satisfaction of that set piece yields another realization: it's the only thing Wohl offers that wouldn't translate just as well on a screen.—*V.C. (Through March 1.)*

My Name Is Lucy Barton
Samuel J. Friedman

Laura Linney stars in a one-woman adaptation of Elizabeth Strout's 2016 novel (directed

ILLUSTRATION BY JUAN BERNABEU

by Richard Eyre, for the Manhattan Theatre Club), about a woman from Amgash, Illinois, who escapes her poor upbringing to become a writer in New York. Lucy tells the audience that years ago, while in the hospital with a mysterious illness, she woke to find her estranged mother in her room, part comfort, part threat. Together, they tell tales of Amgash, circling the traumas of Lucy's childhood—caused by the cruelties of Lucy's mother and her father, who had post-traumatic stress disorder from serving in the Second World War. Strout's language, deftly adapted for the stage by Rona Munro, is elegantly simple, and Linney, radiating warmth and lucidity, is just the right actor to bring it to life—her ninety-minute performance is a feat of subtle bravura. But this production could use more life—an escape from the antiseptic cloister of the hospital room to the rousing world outside.—*Alexandra Schwartz (Reviewed in our issue of 1/27/20.) (Through Feb. 29.)*

Paris

Atlantic Stage 2

Emmie (Jules Latimer), short for Emaani, grew up in Paris, Vermont, but none of her co-workers at a big, exploitative retailer are inclined to believe her: why haven't they ever seen her around? Perhaps it's because she's black, or because she spent time away at college before family trouble dragged her back. Whatever the reason, now she's returned home, her face mysteriously bruised, and so grateful for the store's poverty-level wages that she almost cries when she gets the gig. "Paris," the first play by Eboni Booth, directed by Knud Adams for the Atlantic Theatre Company, is the darkest possible workplace comedy, haunted by Emmie's hard-ass boss, Gar (Eddie K. Robinson), and a cast of co-workers who, appropriately jaded by their anti-union employer, form quiet bonds of solidarity. Booth hides a clear moral sense and an ear for empathy behind her skewed, subtly menacing slapstick.—*V.C. (Through Feb. 16.)*

A Soldier's Play

American Airlines Theatre

Charles Fuller's 1981 play—which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1982 and has been revived by the Roundabout Theatre Company, directed by Kenny Leon—takes place in the mid-nineteen-forties, on a segregated Army base in Louisiana, where a black sergeant, Vernon Waters (David Alan Grier), has been mysteriously killed. We glimpse Waters, a proud, haughty, casually abusive man who wields his rank as a bludgeon, in flashbacks that bleed into the present investigation of his death, led by Captain Richard Davenport (Blair Underwood). There are two plays here: the interstitial telling of how Waters's wickedness, born of racism and spurred on by sheer spite, sends him spiralling downward, toward the grave; and a much more rote detective story. Grier plays the sergeant with a pleasing near-incoherence, his splashes of anger and despair always threatening the arrival of fiercer waters. The multivalence of Grier's performance—now comic, now inviting doom, and, finally, much too late, sodden with remorse—gives his moments onstage their bitter, dismal truth: upward motion means nothing when your ceiling is somebody else's floor.—*V.C. (2/3/20) (Through March 15.)*

Timon of Athens

Polonsky Shakespeare Center

In William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton's brusque tale of hard luck, directed by Simon Godwin for Theatre for a New Audience, Timon (Kathryn Hunter) is a rich woman—Hunter effortlessly pulls off the flipped gender of the protagonist, originally written as male—who is profligately generous to her friends. At a grand dinner she hosts, the sanest guest is the astringently philosophical Apemantus (Arnie Burton), who scorns the display; despite his warnings, Timon has spent her very last cent, and when the bill collectors come the rich partyers are no help. Soon Timon is living on the city's outskirts, the fun in her face gone. The language in the latter half of the play is full of the rhetorical device chiasmus, and those clever phrasings are echoed in Hunter's astounding performance. She brings to each dense moment a platter bejewelled with ironies. There is neither up nor down, utter failure nor lasting success, for Hunter's wind-tossed Timon—only the person nearly naked, cast away and caught in life's centrifuge.—*V.C. (2/3/20) (Through Feb. 9.)*

MOVIES

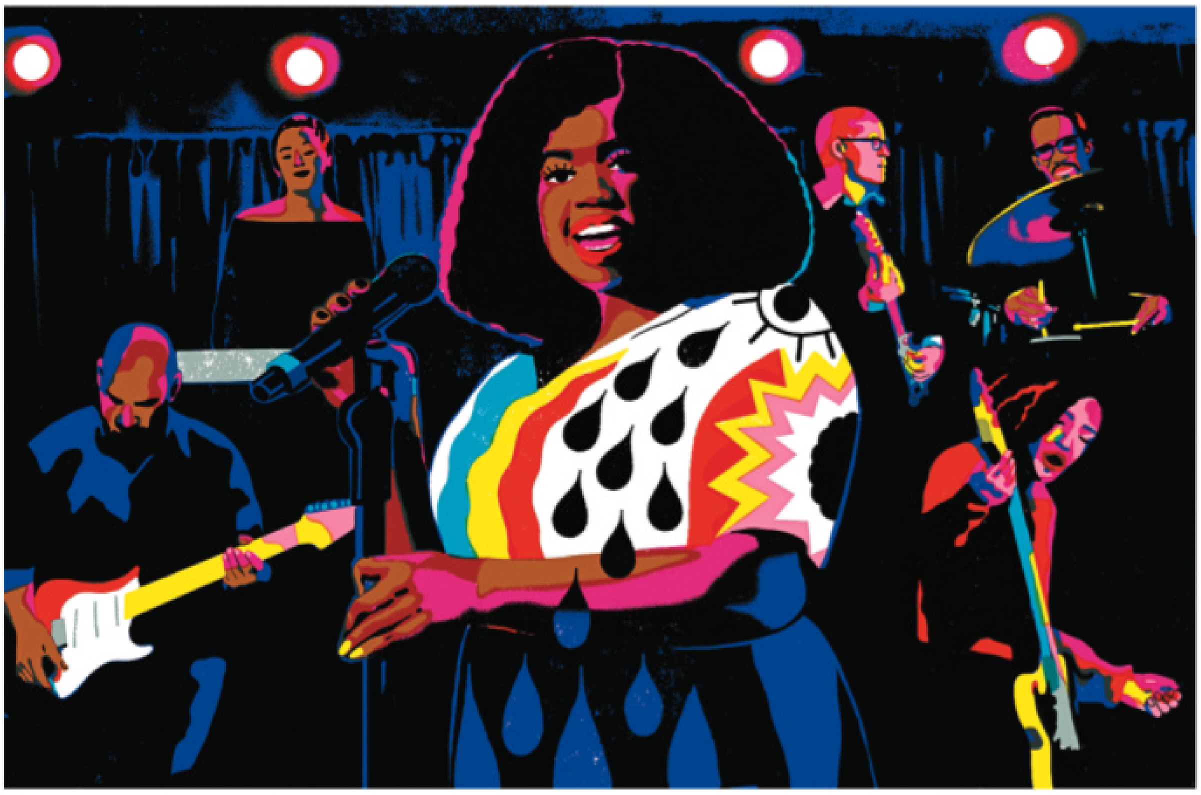
Cane River

This 1982 drama, long believed lost, is a major rediscovery: the only feature by Horace Jenkins, an African-American filmmaker who died soon after the movie's completion. It's centered on the romance of a young black man, Peter Metoyer (Richard Romain), a recent college graduate and a poet who returns to his family's farm in rural Louisiana, and a local tour guide named Maria Mathis (Tômmye Myrick), a twenty-two-year-old black woman who, desperate to escape small-town life, is about to leave home for college. Maria comes from a poor family descended from enslaved Africans; Peter comes from a landowning mixed-race family (his ancestors include enslaved people who also owned slaves), and their relationship is strained by the groups' long-standing social differences. Jenkins's spare, frank lyricism foregrounds the couple's tense discussions about the traumas of history, the weight of cultural memory, and the pressure of racial injustice; he lends the intimate tale a vast and vital resonance.—*Richard Brody (BAM.)*

Color Out of Space

There are five members of the Gardner family: Nathan (Nicolas Cage); his wife, Theresa

OFF BROADWAY



One of the brightest lights of the experimental-theatre scene, Young Jean Lee has a way of staring directly at whatever makes her—and us—uncomfortable. The results are funny, strange, genre-resistant, and often beautiful. "Untitled Feminist Show," from 2012, was a wordless pageant of gender politics, featuring six performers in the nude. "Straight White Men," which made it to Broadway in 2018, was a kind of simulation of a naturalistic family drama, without actually being one. Starting on Feb. 4, Second Stage presents her work **"We're Gonna Die"**—part rock concert, part comedy, and self-consciously neither of those things—directed and choreographed by Raja Feather Kelly. Its subject, the cold fact of mortality, is excellent fodder for Lee. After all, what makes us queasier?—*Michael Schulman*

ILLUSTRATION BY SONIA PULIDO

(Joely Richardson); and their children, Lavinia (Madeleine Arthur), Benny (Brendan Meyer), and Jack (Julian Hilliard). They live in the woods with a large dog and a small herd of alpacas, who seem a little nervous, as if expecting bad news. It arrives in the form of a meteorite, which lands nearby. Under its influence, vegetation turns a funky purple-pink, while the humans lose their composure—and fear for their sanity. (As for the alpacas, don't ask.) Richard Stanley's film, adapted from a story by H. P. Lovecraft, begins with pagan rituals and slowly builds to high-level nuttiness, although none of the special effects, freakish as they are, can match the gonzo dedication of Cage's performance. A brief coda adds a note of ecological dread that even Lovecraft might not have foreseen.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 2/3/20.) (In wide release.)*

The Gentlemen

Guy Ritchie's raucous new film stars Matthew McConaughey as Mickey Pearson, a drug lord who grows acres of cannabis on properties belonging to actual British lords. The tale of Mickey's rise to power, aided by his wife (Michelle Dockery) and his unflappable fixer (Charlie Hunnam), is unearthed by a private investigator (Hugh Grant), who—cunningly but unwisely—attempts to use his findings for the purposes of blackmail. Ritchie likes to traffic back and forth between high society and lowlifes, averting his gaze from the middling folk in between, and straining with all his might to shock us with the saltiness of his language. (How peculiar, then, that so little of the movie should ring true.) With Jeremy Strong and Colin Farrell, plus Eddie Marsan as a newspaper editor who is kidnapped and then filmed having sex in a pigsty. So much for subtlety.—*A.L. (2/3/20) (In wide release.)*

Harriet

The intensity and the lyrical fervor of Kasi Lemmons's direction lend this historical drama, about Harriet Tubman's escape from slavery and her work with the Underground Railroad, the exalted energy of secular scripture. The action begins in Maryland, in 1849, where the enslaved Araminta Ross (Cynthia Erivo) is granted permission to marry the freeman John Tubman (Zackary Momoh). When she is denied the freedom that she'd been promised, she risks her life to flee to Philadelphia. Taking her mother's first name, Harriet, she returns covertly—and armed—to guide her relatives to freedom, and is pursued by her former master and his posse. Then, after the Fugitive Slave Act is passed, in 1850, Northern cities no longer insure safety. The movie, written by Lemmons and Gregory Allen Howard, presents a gripping and wide-ranging view of her activity—including her work with a daring black clergyman (Vondie Curtis-Hall) and the black abolitionist William Still (Leslie Odom, Jr.), who devotedly records the stories of the formerly enslaved—and her inner life, featuring depictions of the virtually prophetic visions that guide her in her mission.—*R.B. (In wide release and streaming.)*

The Rhythm Section

This witless and soulless thriller squanders a formidable cast, including Blake Lively and Jude Law, who endure arduous fight scenes in a doomed effort to lend the flimsy plot some plausibility. Lively plays a bourgeois British woman named Stephanie Patrick, who, after losing her parents and her sister in a terrorist bombing of an airplane, inexplicably and stereotypically becomes a prostitute, bruised and bedraggled. On a tip from a journalist, she tracks down a spy (Law) who fills her in on the details of the attack, gives her rough and rapid paramilitary training, and sends her on picturesque missions to Madrid, New York, Tangier, and Marseilles to unravel the conspiracy and avenge the killings. The director, Reed Morano, adorns the board-game plotting and the blank characters with whip-pan and shaky-cam flash, and the editor, Joan Sobel, does her best to enliven the thudding drama with flashbacks and flash-forwards. Lively is given little to work with besides a succession of wigs and stunts; the movie plays like an audition reel for a superhero role. With Sterling K. Brown, as a cagey operative.—*R.B. (In wide release.)*

The Tall Target

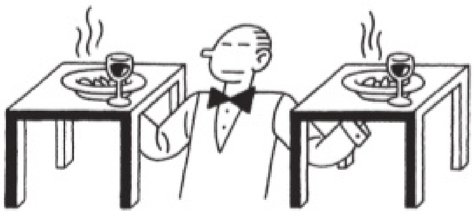
This historical film noir, set in 1861, is centered on a plot against President-elect Lincoln's life as he travels to his Inauguration. Dick Powell stars as a New York police sergeant named John Kennedy, who boards the southbound train that's conveying Lincoln to Washington (in defiance of Kennedy's department, run by Tammany Democrats) in the hope of thwarting the plot. Along the way, the officer finds himself the target of a hired killer. The action unfolds amid bitter divisions on the eve of civil war; the voluble passengers include a pro-Confederate officer, his sister, and the black woman who is enslaved to them (played with heartbreaking grace by the young Ruby Dee), along with a female Boston abolitionist, a New York businessman whose interests are threatened by Lincoln's policies, and a sordid gallery of political conspirators. The director Anthony Mann fleshes out the intricate story with vigorous and subtle attention to its disparate elements—political, psychological, and brutal. Released in 1951.—*R.B. (Film Forum, Feb. 5-6, and streaming.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

AT THE MOVIES

COURTESY DREAMLAB FILMS

An outstanding offering in this year's edition of MOMA's documentary showcase Doc Fortnight (running Feb. 5-19) is Mehrdad Oskouei's **"Sunless Shadows,"** filmed in Iranian prisons and centered on women who've been convicted of killing their abusive husbands or fathers. The participants detail the many monstrous varieties of abuse that they endured and emphasize the unresponsiveness of the legal system to their complaints—including the power of husbands to deny their wives divorces and the police's refusal to intervene in cases of domestic violence, even to the point of siding with violent husbands. One long-abused elderly woman who killed her husband remains on death row only because her sons demand her execution as revenge. When a group of women discuss the case of a fellow-convict who was forced to marry at the age of twelve, one of them exhorts the filmmaker to take the camera out of the prison and into households where such practices endure. Oskouei's documentary presents an agonizing view of patriarchal power in public and private life, law and custom alike.—*Richard Brody*



TABLES FOR TWO

Leo

123 Havemeyer St., Brooklyn

Improbable but undeniable: beans are having a moment. Last December, the food Web site Eater published an essay called "Cool Beans," which detailed "How the humble legume—especially heirloom varieties—became the go-to ingredient for home cooks." (In 2018, this magazine profiled Rancho Gordo, the largest, and cultiest, retailer of heirloom beans in the U.S.) As of this month, you can buy a book, unaffiliated, called "Cool Beans: The Ultimate Guide to Cooking with the World's Most Versatile Plant-Based Protein," by the food editor of the Washington *Post*.

And so you could say that the people behind Leo, which opened last fall in Williamsburg, have their fingers on the pulse, pun intended (and apologized for). For several years, Ops, a restaurant in Bushwick with some of the same owners, has had simply prepared beans on its menu. At Leo, Scarlet Runners, an heirloom variety, are gently braised with garlic, rosemary, and sage until easily crushed between the teeth but still firm and meaty, generously salted, and finished with a glug of grassy olive oil.

Anthropologists reading this in the future, take note: Leo is a useful time capsule, a snapshot of right now. To drink with the beans, there is natural wine, to which diners—who, like the staff, skew young and stylish, in cropped pants and clogs—may help themselves from a shelf or a refrigerator by the bar. (To readers in the present, I suggest asking for a recommendation, lest you find yourself misled by a whimsical label into choosing something with top notes of wet cardboard.)

To sop up the bean broth (also known, to Rancho Gordo heads, as pot liquor), there is naturally fermented sourdough, baked on the premises and available by the loaf in an adjoining takeout shop. Leo's pizza—Neapolitan-style round pies in the dining room, Roman-style square slices in the shop—and calzones are also made with naturally fermented dough.

On a given day, a calzone might be stuffed with 'nduja and collards, a pizza topped with tangy farmer cheese, flowering broccoli, prosciutto, and Robin's Koginut squash, a variety bred by the chef Dan Barber. A salad listed on the menu as "lettuces" might be heavy on chicories, pale spears of tender Belgian endive mingling with magenta ruffles of Treviso radicchio, frilly frisée, and flat-leaf parsley, all slicked in a citrusy vinaigrette.

More than one trend forecaster has predicted that lasagna is going to be huge in 2020. At Leo, you can order a gorgeous slab of it: pillowy layers of thin noodles, stretchy provola cheese, and bright, tart marinara, with a bit of bite from crackly edges and the finely chopped blanched kale folded into the sauce. You'd never know it was gluten-free (thanks to corn-flour pasta).

For something sweet, the soft-serve is great—a swirl of pithy grapefruit and caramel approximates a breakfast brûlée—but the tiramisu, that lasagna of desserts, is better. Until fairly recently, I associated tiramisu with the kind of red-sauce joint whose charmingly chintzy atmosphere is more alluring than its food. It seemed too often to be a stodgy, compacted mass of ladyfingers and mascarpone cream, chalky with cocoa powder and flavorless but for blunt hits of Marsala wine and coffee, as if it were trying to sober itself up.

A few years ago, I started to suspect that a renaissance was afoot. At Una Pizza Napoletana, on the Lower East Side, they swapped the ladyfingers for lemon sponge cake, the Marsala for rum and Cynar. At Leonti, on the Upper West Side (now, sadly, closed), the mascarpone was so light that you could see air bubbles. Leo's version comes in a fluted glass tumbler that showcases its appealingly messy striations, as spoonable as pudding. Vanilla angel-food sheet cake is soaked in espresso and a soft spike of rum and amaro. The finished trifle is showered in delicate curls of Askinosie chocolate, and each creamy bite bears an unmistakable vein of salt. Tiramisu is as cool as beans. *(Dishes $5-$14, pizzas $16-$22.)*

—*Hannah Goldfield*

PHOTOGRAPH BY ZACHARY ZAVISLAK FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

Now is the time
to start listening.

Join the best writers in America
as they make sense of the world
and the people changing it.
Hosted by David Remnick.

THE NEW YORKER
RADIO HOUR
PODCAST

A co-production with
WNYC STUDIOS

Listen on Apple Podcasts
Listen on Spotify

THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
DOING TRUMP A FAVOR

The sordid truth of the impeachment trial of Donald Trump is that it will end with the Senate Majority Leader, Mitch McConnell, doing him a favor: delivering the votes, with little regard for the facts. That is sadly appropriate, because Trump's favors—the ones he covets, the ones he demands—and the terms on which he extracts them, remain the trial's most contested issue. The House managers cited Trump's statement to President Volodymyr Zelensky, of Ukraine, in their phone call on July 25, 2019—"I would like you to do us a favor though"—as the crux of a corrupt scheme. Trump's lawyers countered that he was talking not about his "personal interests" but about America's. In their trial brief, they argued that Trump "frequently uses variations of the phrase 'do us a favor,'" and cited examples. "Do me a favor," he said he'd asked Europe. "Would you buy a lot of soybeans, right now?" "Do me a favor," he said he'd asked North Korea. "You've got this missile engine testing site. . . . Can you close it up?" The lawyers could have added Trump's claim that, before choosing Alexander Acosta to be his Secretary of Labor, he'd worried that he was related to the CNN reporter Jim Acosta, so he told his staff, "Do me a favor—go back and check the family tree."

But, of course, what Trump was asking from Ukraine wasn't about soybean farmers' livelihoods, or arms control, or even genealogical information. He wanted dirt on a political opponent and was willing to hold up military aid for an ally in order to get it. Trump's core belief seems to have been that Ukraine, by receiving aid from America, incurred a debt that should be paid to him personally. That equation works only if, as Adam Schiff, the lead House manager, put it on Wednesday, "you view your interests as synonymous with the nation's interests." And Trump does. He has no conception of where he ends and the country begins.

Nor, apparently, do his lawyers, most notably Alan Dershowitz. "Every public official that I know believes that his election is in the public interest—and mostly you're right!" Dershowitz told the senators. And so, "if a President did something that he believes will help him get elected, in the public interest, that cannot be the kind of quid pro quo that results in impeachment." With that, Dershowitz provided a pseudo-intellectual scaffold for Trump's self-delusion.

Somewhere in there is the distorted echo of a real argument. A President should at least consider the electoral effect of what he does, not because his continued tenure is so important but because the opinions of citizens are. They are the ones who have to fight the wars and bear the burdens. Voters can be wrong, but even then they can still be helpful in discerning the public interest. That is the basis of democratic accountability. But Dershowitz was talking about manipulating the election process itself. In response, Senator Angus King, Independent of Maine, asked if a President could extort an Israeli Prime Minister into charging the President's opponent with anti-Semitism. In fact, by Dershowitz's logic, a President could not only seek foreign assistance in a campaign; he could unleash any number of investigations into his political opponents, declare spurious emergencies to prevent their parties' political gatherings, engage in surveillance, or take measures to limit access to polling stations—suppressing, rather than amplifying, voters' voices.

Dershowitz was arguing that, as Schiff said on Thursday, if the President believes that a deal is in his political interest, "then it doesn't matter how corrupt that quid pro quo is." Schiff was not exaggerating when he called this argument "a descent into constitutional madness." It may even prove more pernicious than the simple fact of Trump's acquittal—which was preordained, given the Republican majority's fealty to him—because the standard it sets for Presidential accountability is so degraded. It's easy to imagine defense teams playing a video of Dershowitz's presentation at a future impeachment trial, in an effort to exonerate another rogue President—perhaps one who has hung a portrait of Trump in the Oval Office. One thing

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

that Republican senators might do, as they so flagrantly fail their country, is to clearly say that Dershowitz’s reasons for acquittal are not theirs.

The first article of impeachment charged Trump with abuse of power in his dealings with Ukraine, and even a few Republicans, such as Senator Lamar Alexander, conceded that the managers had proved that case. (Alexander added that, nonetheless, the President’s actions didn’t warrant impeachment.) The case for the second article, charging Trump with obstruction of Congress for denying it witnesses and documents, was more complicated. Here, the Trump team’s arguments were at least in the realm of constitutional reality, however hypocritically they were offered. The House managers couldn’t quite shake the opinion held by many that they should have fought the President’s defiance of their subpoenas in court, even if it took time. (Indeed, because Trump’s arguments are so extreme and untenable, the House Democrats had been on a winning path in the lower courts.)

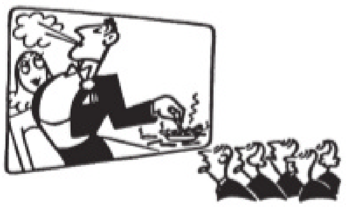
At the same time, the managers hammered home the point that the senators had the power to expose the full story by calling witnesses—which they chose, in a vote on Friday, to toss aside. In doing so, they may have set a precedent that will further limit future Senates in constraining Presidents. The managers also made it abundantly clear that this President has played petty games with momentous matters of war and peace.

Unable to exonerate Trump, his lawyers resorted to making an appeal to blind triumphalism. Eric Herschmann, one of the members of Trump’s team most prone to go off on political tangents—he used up a lot of time attacking President Obama—reeled off a series of economic statistics and approval ratings and told the senators, “If all that is solely, solely, in their words, for his personal and political gain, and not in the best interest of the American people, then I say, God bless him. Keep doing it!” It was as if those figures added up to a paid-in-full purchase of impunity. Trump, for his part, will undoubtedly see an acquittal as further license for abuse.

Earlier in the week, Trump had held a rally in Wildwood, New Jersey, expressly to thank the now Republican congressman Jeff Van Drew for having left the Democratic Party over what Trump called the “impeachment hoax.” He exhorted the crowd to reëlect Van Drew—“really a brave man, what he did was incredible”—and to throw out the Democratic “clowns.” Perhaps the Republican senators, as they trudged toward casting their vote, were making a calculation about how Trump might return the favor with one for them, or their party, or their country. Or maybe they, too, can no longer tell the difference.

—*Amy Davidson Sorkin*

DEPT. OF HATE-WATCHING
“THE OSCAR” RETURNS



The Oscars: Hollywood’s proudest, most self-aggrandizing pageant, a prom and a graduation rolled into one. “The Oscar”: A 1966 film, with a script by the prolific science-fiction writer Harlan Ellison, depicting the sleazy machinations of a vapid, selfish actor to redeem himself by winning a golden statuette. The film, its cast packed with stars—Frank Sinatra, Bob Hope, Tony Bennett, Milton Berle, Ernest Borgnine, Joseph Cotten—some of them Oscar winners, was an overblown, A-list flop, a “Gigli” for the ages. In the *Times*, Bosley Crowther called it a “cheap, synthetic film which dumps filth upon the whole operation of Hollywood.” The Academy, which lent the film its logo and its blessing, apparently regretted it, and has not done so since.

For decades, the practically unwatchable film was largely unseeable, an unrestored embarrassment buried in the Paramount archives. “There’s a samizdat quality,” Erik Nelson, a filmmaker who made a documentary about Ellison, said. “Like ‘Fahrenheit 451,’ fans would be passing around copies and reciting the dialogue.” This Oscar week, an art-house distributor will release a remastered, wide-screen, HD version. “For us, it’s like finding the lost reels of ‘The Magnificent Ambersons’ or Erich von Stroheim’s nine-hour cut of ‘Greed,’ ” Nelson said. “Among comics, this film has a real resonance. There’s a level of complete and utter commitment: the actors are convinced they’re delivering Oscar-worthy material. Every scene is dialled to eleven.” He imagines a “Rocky Horror”-like cult future for “The Oscar.”

Several months ago, Nelson gathered with a few others who love to hate “The Oscar” at a house in the Hollywood Hills, to record commentary for the DVD. Establishing his bona fides, he said, “They film April 5, ’65—who’s a nerd?—at the Academy Awards at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, where ‘My Fair Lady’ is beating out ‘Dr. Strangelove’ for Best Picture and Rex Harrison beats Peter Sellers for Best Actor.”

The house belonged to Josh Olson, a screenwriter who collaborated with Ellison. “The Oscar” was Ellison’s first film, and he never managed to make another one. Patton Oswalt, the comedian, arrived, wearing brick-red shorts and a matching hoodie. He described attending a rare screening of “The Oscar” at the Egyptian Theatre in the early two-thousands: “When Harlan walked down the aisle to go onstage, he went down with both birds blazing, flipping off the audience the whole way.”

Ellison died in 2018. His widow, Susan, sat quietly in a swivel chair, sipping a margarita. “You could not mention ‘The Oscar’ around Harlan *at all*,” she said. “He took it so personally.” Susan—Ellison’s fifth wife— was married to him for thirty-two years. He once gave her a birthday gift of a color-pencil drawing done of Elke Sommer by Edith Head. (Head, who designed the costumes for “The Oscar,” also appeared in it; Sommer was one of the movie’s stars.) Recently, working with an archivist, Susan discovered her husband’s original three-hundred-and-forty-four-page script. Nelson had already committed most of it to memory.

The men got miked, and “The Oscar,” projected onto a large screen in Olson’s living room, began to roll. “Ladies and gentlemen, the star of ‘The Oscar,’ the great Stephen Boyd,” Nelson said. Boyd, as the soulless, amoral actor Frankie Fane, ditches his stripper girlfriend, played by Jill St. John, for Sommer, whom he later spurns. Oswalt put in a good word for Boyd, who played the antagonist to Charlton Heston’s Ben-Hur in the William Wyler film. "He gets a lifetime pass for conspiring with Gore Vidal behind Heston's back to make Ben-Hur's backstory gay," Oswalt said.

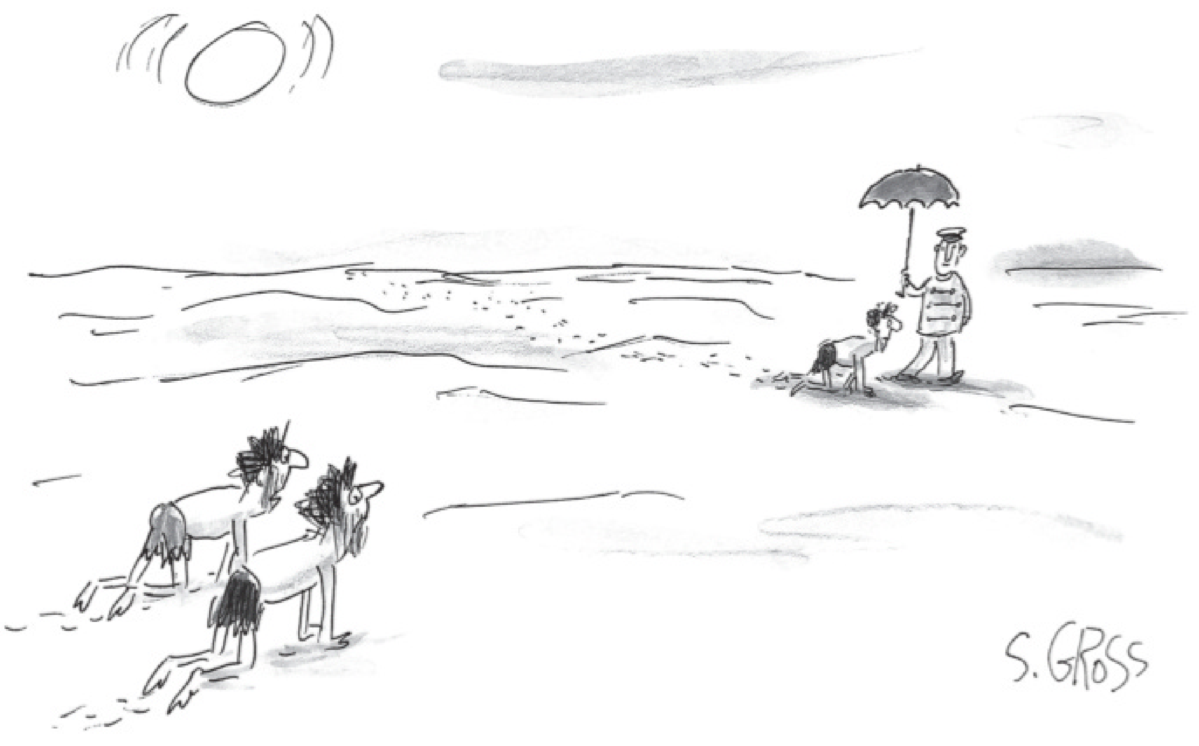
St. John appeared in a tiger-striped bikini and long, claw-tipped gloves. "She made out with Henry Kissinger," Oswalt said, appreciatively. "This is like looking at a new Zapruder print," Nelson said. "It has details! Note the claws." An hour and twenty minutes in, Oswalt was feeling the weight of time: "Who's President? What's a gallon of milk cost now?" He went on, "Folks, you could have read a story to your child, done a puzzle, had a nice conversation with a friend. You will flash back to this moment on your deathbed and curse yourself. 'Harlan, Harlan, if you're up there! So sorry! This movie is so fuckin' bad!'"

Nelson produced Werner Herzog's "Encounters at the End of the World" and was nominated for an Academy Award in 2009; certain that "Man on Wire" would win, he didn't attend the ceremony. Olson, too, is an Oscar nominee, for his adaptation of "A History of Violence," a contender the same year that "Brokeback Mountain" won. "As Harlan was fond of saying, when we were writing together and arguing, 'You are an Academy Award loser,'" he said.

In the movie's final scene, Frankie Fane is at the Academy Awards, up for Best Actor. When Merle Oberon, as herself, announces the winner—"Frank . . . Sinatra"—Fane begins clapping psychotically, his face a mask of bewilderment, a GIF in every frame.

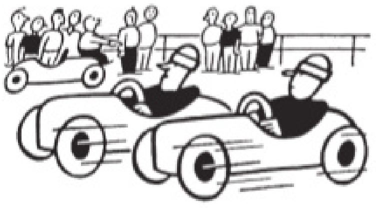
Nelson said, "We have to swear a blood oath that, the next time we all lose at the Oscars, we'll stand up and do the Frankie Fane clap."

—Dana Goodyear



"I think it was Fitzgerald who wrote, 'The very rich are different from you and me.'"

TRUMP COUNTRY
ROUND AND ROUND



At ten o'clock on the morning of January 25th, when Donald Trump's lawyers started the clock on their defense at his impeachment trial, thousands of his supporters gathered at the Daytona International Speedway, two hundred miles north of Mar-a-Lago, for twenty-four hours of uninterrupted auto racing. At the Rolex 24, America's only daylong endurance race—Michael Avenatti has competed in it, and Paul Newman won when he was seventy—thirty-eight cars drive laps around three and a half miles of hot asphalt through the night and into the next afternoon, or until they break down or crash. The speedway's seats were scantily filled; most attendees camped in a microcivilization of tents and R.V.s. Some never leave the campgrounds to see the cars; a sign at the entrance read "Happy Hour 1:40 P.M.-1:40 P.M." Another sign, in the outfield, said "Trump 2020, the Sequel: Make the Liberals Cry Again."

Despite the President's tweet encouraging his followers to watch his trial on TV, there was no impeachment talk at the raceway. A man named Michael Hunt, who was wearing a neon-yellow T-shirt and drinking a large cup of Mountain Dew, said, "The race is about fellowship." Nearby, the owner of an orange R.V. with a Confederate-flag decal on its bumper explained the sticker's provenance: "It started with the Civil War, or whatever. The North against the South. And then there was slavery involved. I don't know the exact whole story. They've turned it into a racist thing."

An elderly British man named Barry Platt weighed in: "The first slaves in America were white English people, but we don't go whining about it. Get over it. My buddy's back hurts"—he gestured toward a friend—"and he's not complaining." Scott Adkins, whose back hurt and who was smoking Swisher Sweets, responded, "They took all your guns away in England." He went on, "I've got enough guns to hold off the Mexican Army." (Adkins is currently rereading the "Game of Thrones" books for the seventeenth time.)

"There's not a place for politics in sports at all," Platt said. "I want to see fast cars passing each other. That's it." He continued, "This is about noise, speed, and smell. Men have always raced. It's fun time for boys: fires, generators, R.V.s. Men like noise."

"Daytona is the only place where you'll see a Lamborghini in a Super 8-motel parking lot," Hunt said.

Meanwhile, in the fan zone, the racetrack announcer mentioned the coronavirus and an upcoming Burns Night poetry reading. Sponsors handed out earplugs. A group of bachelor-party attendees in the stands surrounded the bachelor, who wore a shirt that read "Same Pussy Forever, It Had Better Be Good." Outside the gates, signs advertised $8.99 Botox and affordable dentures.

Back at the campground, Wes Emmons, who met Sean Hannity "when he was a nobody," handed out shots of

Crown Royal whiskey. "My buddy Greg over there is the most liberal, left-wing hack," he said. He pointed to a man wearing a Tito's-vodka cap. "We agree on nothing. But we have a great time. I like Trump, but I wouldn't want a whole string of Trumps. It was a one-time; hit the reset switch."

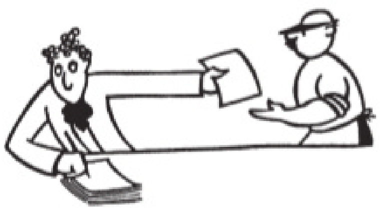
One camp over, Rick Nichols, who has attended the race for the past nineteen years with his brother, John—a former military contractor who now makes hotel-room locks—and their seventy-three-year-old father, talked strategy: "I maintain a consistent buzz. I have a beer every twenty minutes." People traipsed back and forth between the camps and the track. "We do naps and shifts," Nichols said. "We go in later to see the carnage," his brother added.

After midnight, a woman in plaid pajamas wandered over with a tray of chocolate-covered-Oreo pudding shots, and a Florida Christian ministry dispensed coffee and doughnuts. Nichols, standing on top of a generator, explained his trick for watching the race. "Keep your eye on just one car so that you don't get speed hypnosis," he said, drinking a vodka-and-Fresca.

During hour nineteen, after a Lamborghini caught fire, Tom Klebeck, an international consultant and a regular racegoer, talked about how the race was a referendum on America's greatness. "You have consumer confidence here," he said. "I bought a patriotic T-shirt here. Made in America. This makes me feel good about America. You didn't see any violent activity. Everyone's having a good time. There's a lot of money being spent here."

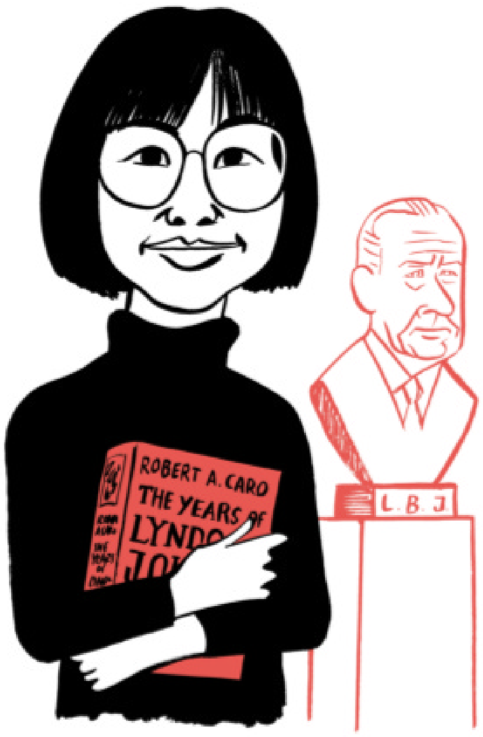
—*Antonia Hitchens*

CHENGDU POSTCARD
CARO FEVER



Last summer, when He Yujia was preparing to transition, at least in spirit, from the Texas Hill Country to the U.S. Senate, she began to receive anxious messages on Douban, a Chinese social-networking service where readers discuss books. "I want to know, boss, when you can translate the next few volumes of the Lindeng Yuehanxun biography," a reader wrote. Another chimed in: "After half a year, there's still no news about 'Ladder of Promotion.' Do you have information about when it will be published?"

Lindeng Yuehanxun is the transliteration of Lyndon Johnson, and "Ladder of Promotion"—"Jinjie zhi Ti"—is the Chinese title of "Means of Ascent," the second book of Robert Caro's projected five-volume biography of the former President. In the U.S., some readers fret about the eighty-four-year-old Caro, whose pace is famously glacial. ("It's heartwarming that so many people are worried that I won't finish," Caro told Chris Wallace, of Fox News, last year.) In China, where He Yujia has been contracted to translate the first four Johnson books, reader concerns have nothing to do with health or speed. Yujia is an engaging thirty-three-year-old who, apart from sporadic gigs as an amateur standup comedian, works seven days a week for as many as fourteen hours a day. Words pour out of her like a mountain stream at the sunny end of that shrinking glacier. She translated Caro's first volume in an amazing four months, and "Ladder of Promotion" went just as fast. The translation was finished by the end of 2018, but it still hasn't been published, and Yujia still hasn't been paid. That's why the Chinese version of "When will Johnson arrive?" is more annoying than heartwarming. "I don't know, I've already submitted the manuscript long ago," Yujia responded to one Douban query. "Perhaps it's because of an extreme strictness toward American writers."



He Yujia

During a recent conversation in the twenty-sixth-floor apartment that Yujia shares with her husband in Chengdu, in southwestern China, she explained that political pressures are often not stated openly. "The editor doesn't tell me anything about why they are holding out the CIP numbers," Yujia said, referring to the Cataloging in Publication number that the Chinese government requires for any book that is to be published. For the past year, the numbers have not been approved for many American books. Chen Liang, Yujia's editor at Beijing Xiron Books, responded politely but with tactical vagueness to an e-mail inquiry about the delay. The phrase he used was "some accidental factors."

For Chinese in the publishing industry, the freezing of American books seems anything but accidental. Yujia has three books in limbo, including "Slouching Towards Bethlehem" and "What's Eating Gilbert Grape." Lu Jia, a fellow Chengdu-based translator, has four of her own awaiting publication. Another of Lu's finished books, "Win Bigly," in which the Dilbert cartoonist Scott Adams analyzes Donald Trump's persuasive abilities, was cancelled entirely during the trade war. "Of course, nobody said that that's the reason," Lu noted. "But everybody knows that that's the reason." Such delays also reflect an over-all crackdown on media that has been carried out under President Xi Jinping.

As of yet, there's no indication that Trump's Phase 1 trade deal will free the backlog of American books. Yujia doesn't worry about things she can't control, and during the recent visit she was hard at work on "Master of the Senate," Caro's third volume. Yujia, who has degrees from Beijing Foreign Studies University and the University of Hong Kong, has never been to the United States, but she has grown attached to Caro's vision of the harsh Texas Hill Country. She pointed to a description in the first book: "Flash floods roared down the gullies now (men called them 'gully-washers' or 'stump-jumpers')." Yujia rendered the last phrase as *zhuangshangtiao:* "jumping over the stakes." She explained that it brings to mind a martial-arts move called the plum-blossom stake, in which a master leaps among barriers. "My editor said, 'You made the flood look like a very strong kung-fu person who is mad!'"

In school, Yujia had learned little about Johnson. "I didn't know he was so important in American history," she said. "In China, we hear about Washington, Kennedy, Clinton, Bush, and Obama. And Nixon, because he's very important to China."

Before translating a novel, Yujia typically reads through to the end. But for nonfiction she prefers to focus strictly on the facts as they accumulate, without having seen the conclusion. At this point, she has a highly detailed image of Texas geography, along with vivid biographical knowledge of Johnson's early mentors and rivals. But she still doesn't know the exact endgame of his political career. She commented that, while she's aware that Johnson was brought down by the Vietnam War, she's not sure if he resigned or left in some other fashion. When her visitor offered to give the short version, she declined. "I want to wait," she said.

—*Peter Hessler*

DOPPELGÄNGERS DEPT.
THE MASKED SINGER

On a recent Thursday, as a band warmed up in a dark subterranean theatre at the Museum of Modern Art, a figure in a rubber mask stood in a doorway offstage, bathed in the red glow of an EXIT light. This was the lead singer of the venerable and anonymous San Francisco art-rock collective the Residents, known for their iconic eyeball helmets, top hats, and tuxedos. They were doing a "stumble-through" rehearsal of "God in Three Persons," their 1988 rock-opera album, newly adapted for the stage by the video artist John Sanborn, who watched from the back of the house. It's about Mr. X, an entrepreneur who becomes entwined with a pair of gender-fluid conjoined twins, who may or may not exist. "I feel that the twins aren't real," Sanborn said. "These are the heavenly angels he wants to live with, but it ain't gonna happen." The show would make its MOMA début that weekend; tickets sold out quickly.

The Residents' eyeball masks, which encompass the head, aren't conducive to singing. ("The eyeball is hell," an associate said.) Here the lead singer wore a bald-capped rubber mask with arched eyebrows and a bulbous nose, which, compared with the eyeball, the associate said, "feels like air-conditioning." The mask was accessorized with sunglasses, a dinner jacket, a Residents eyeball T-shirt, and Under Armour sweatpants.

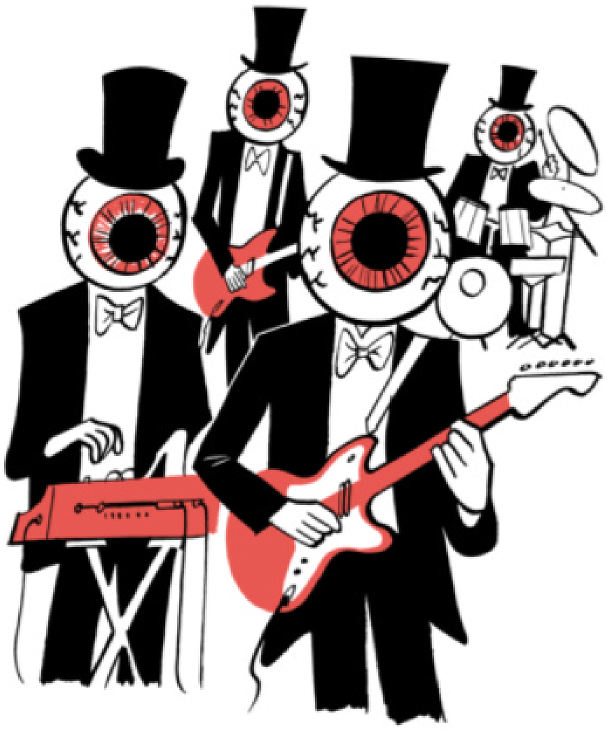
The musicians, including a trombonist and a Mellotron player, kicked into the overture, which featured clangorous music based on "Double Shot (Of My Baby's Love)," by the Swingin' Medallions—the organ riff hints at the eerie garage rock of "96 Tears"—and Sanborn's video art was projected onscreen. Onstage, Mr. X waltzed with a doppelgänger of himself (Caitlin Hicks), and a video depicted him as a kind of televangelist, healing the afflicted in a carnival tent, groping the healed, and appearing in headlines about a scandalous grope-related fall from grace. ("I guess it's a bit of #MeToo," the band's friend Homer Flynn said.) The vocalist Laurie Amat, from the 1988 album, sang the credits as they appeared onscreen.

In their five-decade career, the Residents have released some fifty albums and made dozens of short films. They helped pioneer the music video, before MTV and then on it; inspired artists from Matt Groening to Devo; and composed for "Pee-wee's Playhouse." MOMA's collection includes their videos, a boxed set of recordings displayed inside a refrigerator, and an eyeball helmet. The band became less anonymous a few years ago, when Hardy Fox revealed himself to be its chief composer; he died, of cancer, in 2018.

As "God" begins, Mr. X sings of how he first encounters the twins, who can see into souls and inspire the lonely masses. Touched, he offers to manage them. Sanborn, who met the Residents in the mid-seventies ("My friend said, 'They're fucking with LaserDiscs'"), chose to depict the twins only onscreen, a realm that displays the phantasmagoric workings of Mr. X's mind. Played by the angelic-looking Jiz Lee, "a genderqueer porn star who's worked with me before," as Sanborn put it, the twins are dressed in diaphanous, glowing-white costumes that evoke the Flying Nun. Kaleidoscopic imagery of eyeballs, puppets, and torsos—and severed dogs' legs, and bloody hundred-dollar bills—floated onscreen as Mr. X performed the songs, talking-blues style, in rhymed couplets, evoking the reading aloud of a gruesome, far-out children's book.

After a few songs, the director, Travis Chamberlain, a tidy younger man in a lavender polo shirt, said, "Mr. X needs water!" A bottle of Poland Spring was procured. Later, Mr. X stood on a chair and yelled about a liquid doughnut; flames appeared behind him onscreen. Chamberlain called out, "Does anyone know what happened to our hula hoop?"

The next scene involved a silver, pickle-shaped phallus flying through the air, and stylized erotic wrestling. By the end, the twins had been separated, and Mr. X had spoken of pleasure, pain, illusion, and confusion. They rehearsed their bows, and Amat, beaming ("I love this job!" she said later), joined the masked performers onstage. *Fin.*



The Residents

Afterward, Mr. X removed his bald cap and rested. Hicks shook out her neat dark bob. A few notes. Sanborn: "If you move, you need to move with a certainty, not an oops—we want the kind of chaos we want." Chamberlain: "Laurie, can you make sure your orgasm has a vocoder on it?" After a break, the musicians donned matte-black wolf masks. It was time for the dress rehearsal.

—*Sarah Larson*

LIFE AND LETTERS

LOOK AGAIN

Vivian Gornick revisits the books she's read—and the lives she's lived.

BY ALEXANDRA SCHWARTZ

At eighty-four, Gornick says she is surprised by the writer she turned out to be.

In her memoir "Fierce Attachments," Vivian Gornick describes the formative afternoons that she spent with Nettie, a neighbor in the Bronx apartment building where she grew up. In a building full of street-smart Jews, Nettie, a beautiful Ukrainian widow with a young son and a dreamy, childlike manner, was one of the lone Gentiles. She was a lacemaker, and, after school, Vivian would sit at Nettie's kitchen table, watching her work the fabric and listening to her spin fantasies about money and love. "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I'm coming off the trolley car and I slip and sprain my ankle and they take me to the hospital and the doctor who comes to help me is tall and so handsome, and kind and gentle, and he looks into my face and I look into his, and we can't tear our eyes away from each other," Nettie would say, and keep on saying. Then came young Vivian's turn:

> And I would say, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was a flood or an epidemic or a revolution, and even though I'm this little kid they find me and they say to me, 'You speak so wonderfully you must lead the people out of this disaster.' " I never daydreamed about love or money, I always daydreamed I was making eloquent speeches that stirred ten thousand people to feel their lives, and to *act*.

This is the comedy of sincerity. What is touching here is the child's thirst for recognition; what is funny is the grandiose form that thirst takes. Gornick was a red-diaper baby, the daughter of passionate socialists. It was only natural, when she closed her eyes at night, that she imagined herself not in the arms of a tall, handsome stranger but on a soapbox, as the second coming of Emma Goldman. But, if politics was her birthright, her true love was literature. Novelists, too, can stir people to feel their lives. After she left her parents' socialism behind (you can hear her parodying it, affectionately, in the description of her childhood longing—speeches, speeches, and more speeches), Gornick dreamed of becoming a fiction writer. Unfortunately, her characters refused to come alive. "I couldn't get them in the room, out of the room," she told me recently. "They just lay there like a dead dog." But she could see what made other people's fiction work where hers didn't. So she became a critic.

Gornick was fifty-one in 1987, when "Fierce Attachments," the book that made her name, was published. Now, eight books later, she is eighty-four, though you'd never know it. When I went to see her in her West Village apartment, on a late-December afternoon of no particular significance to either of us—"Two Jewish girls together on Christmas, what could be better?" she said to me over the phone, when we set the date—she answered the door in black leggings and chic wedge sandals, looking like a ballet master. Her hair is short and gray, her eyes very blue and very big. She invited me to sit on the couch, and arranged herself in an armchair at a right angle to it, so that I had to turn toward her as we spoke. Later, it occurred to me that the setup mimicked that of analyst and analysand, with me in the position of the patient.

Thanks to rent stabilization, Gornick has lived in the apartment, a postwar one-bedroom, for upward of thirty years; her home, like her prose, is straightforward in style, unfussy, minimally but functionally adorned. The table, couch, and chairs are there to be used by the body, not enjoyed by the eye. A scratching post had been put out for the benefit of Boo and Puss, Gornick's two cats, who were doing sneaky things somewhere else. The apartment's cherished features are its wide bank of windows, partly shrouded, during my visit, by construction plastic and paraphernalia (Gor-

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRIGITTE LACOMBE

nick's building is undergoing a face-lift), which allow her to look west onto her beloved New York, and her bookshelves, their contents recently thinned and reorganized with the help of an assistant.

Gornick didn't feel sentimental about getting rid of so many of her books. She has a good sense of which ones she can forget about and which she'll want to return to. In fact, she has just written her own book about that, "Unfinished Business: Notes of a Chronic Re-Reader," which Farrar, Straus & Giroux will publish this month. The idea for it came when a friend invited Gornick to reread "Howards End," which neither of them had looked at in decades. She was shocked to find how different E. M. Forster's text was from her memory of it. So she decided to revisit books that had influenced her in one way or another, and to write about what she found in them, and in herself. The result is a hybrid of Gornick's two genres, criticism and memoir, and it puts the reader in mind of the Nelson Mandela quotation about returning to a place only to find out how much you yourself have changed. As she writes of reading the Italian master Natalia Ginzburg, "First time around, my eyes were opened to something important about who I was at the moment of reading; later, to who or what I was becoming. But then I lived long enough to feel a stranger to myself—no one more surprised than me that I turned out to be who I am."

She has reason for surprise. What Gornick turned out to be—a woman who makes her living by writing, who is childless and happily divorced, who lives alone without suffering stigma for it—is a phenomenon of the twentieth century, a creature who didn't exist in the Bronx of her youth, where women were wives, widows, or wives- and widows-to-be. She likes to call herself an "odd woman," a label borrowed from the title of an 1893 novel by George Gissing that deals with the first breaths of the modern feminist movement in England. It is a way of acknowledging the previous generations of independent women whose shoulders she stands on, as well as the degree to which she still feels herself to be a person apart in her own time.

As a girl, Gornick grasped that work—the kind that happens out in the world, not just in the kitchen—was important in leading a full life. During the Second World War, her mother, Bess, took an office job with a uniform manufacturer in Manhattan, where she had the exhilarating, purposeful experience that so many women of her generation did when the men went off to fight. Vivian, eight or so, was thrilled that her mother was out of the house, but her father wasn't, and he made Bess quit. This may have been the only act of machismo ever displayed by Louis Gornick, a kind, mild-mannered man who labored five days a week over a steam iron in the garment district. He and Bess came from the Russian Empire; as she writes in "Unfinished Business," Gornick and her older brother were "shaped, throughout our lives, by our parents' anxiety-ridden experience of life on the periphery." But within the self-contained universe of their building Bess Gornick was at the center. She was one of the only women in the building who spoke English without an accent, and she kept house ruthlessly, always kneading, wringing, or scrubbing something, all the while pushing herself into the neighbors' business. "Shrewd, volatile, unlettered, they performed on a Dreiserian scale," Gornick writes of the women around her. "And I—the girl growing in their midst, being made in their image—I absorbed them as I would chloroform on a cloth laid against my face."

When Gornick was thirteen, her father died, of a heart attack, and her childhood came to an abrupt end. Bess took to the living-room sofa and refused to get up, moaning in agony at her abandonment. This situation lasted for years. Bess had idealized not only her husband but the idea of love, and without an object to receive it her adulation became hysterical. "Fierce Attachments" is an unflinching book; there is real repulsion in the way that Gornick writes of her mother's abject wallowing, and horrified awe at the duration and the commitment of the performance. Bess, however, did one thing right by her child: she insisted that she pursue an education. Gornick enrolled at City College, and her world bloomed. Taking the subway from the Bronx to Manhattan every day was like going from Kansas to Oz. At graduation, Bess was distressed to discover that her daughter had spent four years as an English major. What were you supposed to do with a degree like that? She had thought Vivian was training to become a teacher.

I asked Gornick how she knew that literature was something worthy of study. She looked at me as if I had asked how she knew that clean water was good to drink. I felt ashamed. Like her mother, I was thinking in terms of the market, and she in terms of the soul.

"Because it was so thrilling. Because it made me feel alive," she said. "And as if I was in the presence of exciting and absorbing realities. The way people feel when they get religious. I felt that there was a story beneath the surface of ordinary, everyday life. And the books contain that story. And, if I can get to it, life will be rich."

The other reason that Gornick wanted to study literature was that she wanted to be a writer. She had known desk ecstasy, the feeling of the world disappearing as you till your mind for the page, and once you experience that it's hard to do anything else with your life. But how to go about being a writer professionally took her a long time to figure out. During the two and a half years of her first marriage, to a painter she met while she was in graduate school at Berkeley, she mostly banged her head against the wall. The marriage didn't fare any better. Before the couple wed, they were young bohemians on the make, eating together at the kitchen table straight from the pot. After, her husband expected her to have dinner ready for him every night, like some starched suburban housewife. (Something similar happened to Lee Krasner and Jackson Pollock, and we know how that story ended.) Gornick went along with it—for a time. His expectations were hers, too. "Love (as we had been told since infancy) was the territory upon which our particular battle with Life was to be pitched," she writes, of her indoctrination as a girl in the forties and fifties. "The promise of love alone gave us the courage to dream of leaving these caution-ridden precincts in order to turn our faces outward toward genuine experience." So Gornick didn't just want to give speeches after all. Passion would be her ticket into the world.

Literature magnified this idea to a

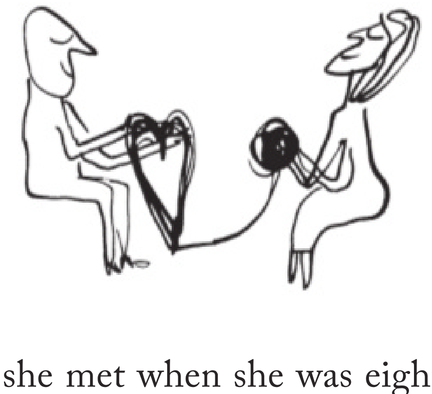
burning point. As a young woman, Gornick loved D. H. Lawrence and Colette, those bards of the flesh. She was in college when she encountered "Sons and Lovers," the first book she examines in "Unfinished Business," and instantly took it as a "biblical text." She identified with Miriam, the timid young lover of Paul Morel, Lawrence's hero, a woman whose "primary need is to know that she is desired, and for herself alone." On her second reading, she felt closer to Clara, Paul's other lover, erotically knowledgeable and free, but still grasping. When Gornick read the book for the third time, in her thirties, the women's movement was in full swing, she had left her second husband, and she identified with Paul—who, not incidentally, also struggles to break from a dissatisfied, suffocating mother: "preoccupied with desiring rather than being desired, I gloried in giving myself up to the shocking pleasure of sexual experience itself—rich, full, transporting—imagining myself now, like Paul at the end of the novel, the hero of my own life."

This is definitive, triumphant. But now, in her fourth time through, Gornick sees that Paul's quest to free himself through passion only seems like liberation. It's a trap, just like the stultifying family life that preceded it. Reading Gornick on Lawrence—and Gornick on Gornick on Lawrence—is exciting. She builds real heat. She admires him for pushing, hard, against the bourgeois order that told him and everyone else to sit down and button up—"like an abolitionist among antislavery liberals who say yes, slavery is terrible, but in time it will die out, be patient, while the abolitionist says fuck that, now or never, and goes to war." Sensual experience was Lawrence's path to freedom and his metaphor for it. But, she goes on,

> if Lawrence were alive today, this metaphor would not be available to him because today all have had long experience of the sexual freedom once denied, and have discovered firsthand that the making of a self from the inside out is not to be achieved through the senses alone. Not only does sexual ecstasy not deliver us to ourselves, one must have a self already in place to know what to do with it, should it come.

This observation is at the core of an earlier critical book of Gornick's, "The End of the Novel of Love," which was first published in 1997 and will be reissued next month. Sex has been drained of its figurative power, Gornick argues, because people now know it for what it is. It has been demystified, destigmatized, made mundane. The stocking has been rolled all the way down, and now that we can see everything there's nothing to see. Returning, in "Unfinished Business," to Colette's early novels, which captivated her as a young woman, Gornick finds her dated and narrow-minded, and when, in our conversation, I offhandedly called Colette a feminist—after all, hadn't she made her way in the world by her pen, writing about women's experience?—Gornick shut me down. "It's all in service of erotic passion as the central experience of a life. I can't go with that," she said. (Still, she liked the Keira Knightley bio-pic from 2018 as much as I did.) "Why, I found myself saying to her, have you not made larger sense of things?" she writes of Colette, in "Unfinished Business." "Yes, I have from you the incomparable feel of an intelligent woman in the grip of romantic obsession, and that is strong stuff. But today sexual passion alone is only a situation, not a metaphor; as a story that begins and ends with itself, it no longer signifies."

At the same time, "Unfinished Business," like all her memoirs, is a sexy book. Erotic experience may no longer work for her in metaphorical terms, but it is very much at the center of the story of her own life. In a chapter that touches on the novelist Elizabeth Bowen's helpless, masochistic love for an indifferent man, Gornick tells us about Daniel, a man she met when she was eighteen and he was ten years older and "to whom I remained in thrall for decades" even though he swiftly proved himself to be a cheat and a pathological liar. Years later, he shows up at her door to ask what she got from the affair. She leaves the question hanging. At the time, she may not have known how to respond, but now she does: he gave her material, and it is she who will tell the tale.



Gornick's second, connected critical revelation is that at the heart of great literature is the internal struggle that a character, pulled in different directions by competing urges, undergoes to unify himself or herself—the fight against "the perniciousness of the human self-divide," she calls it. This is what she thinks makes great writers write, and it is what they write about. Gornick's ideal of the quest for the unified self is inherently psychoanalytic; she sees writers attempting to reach on the page what many people spend years searching for in their therapist's office. Fortunately for therapists, most patients are never fully cured. Fortunately for readers, neither are writers.

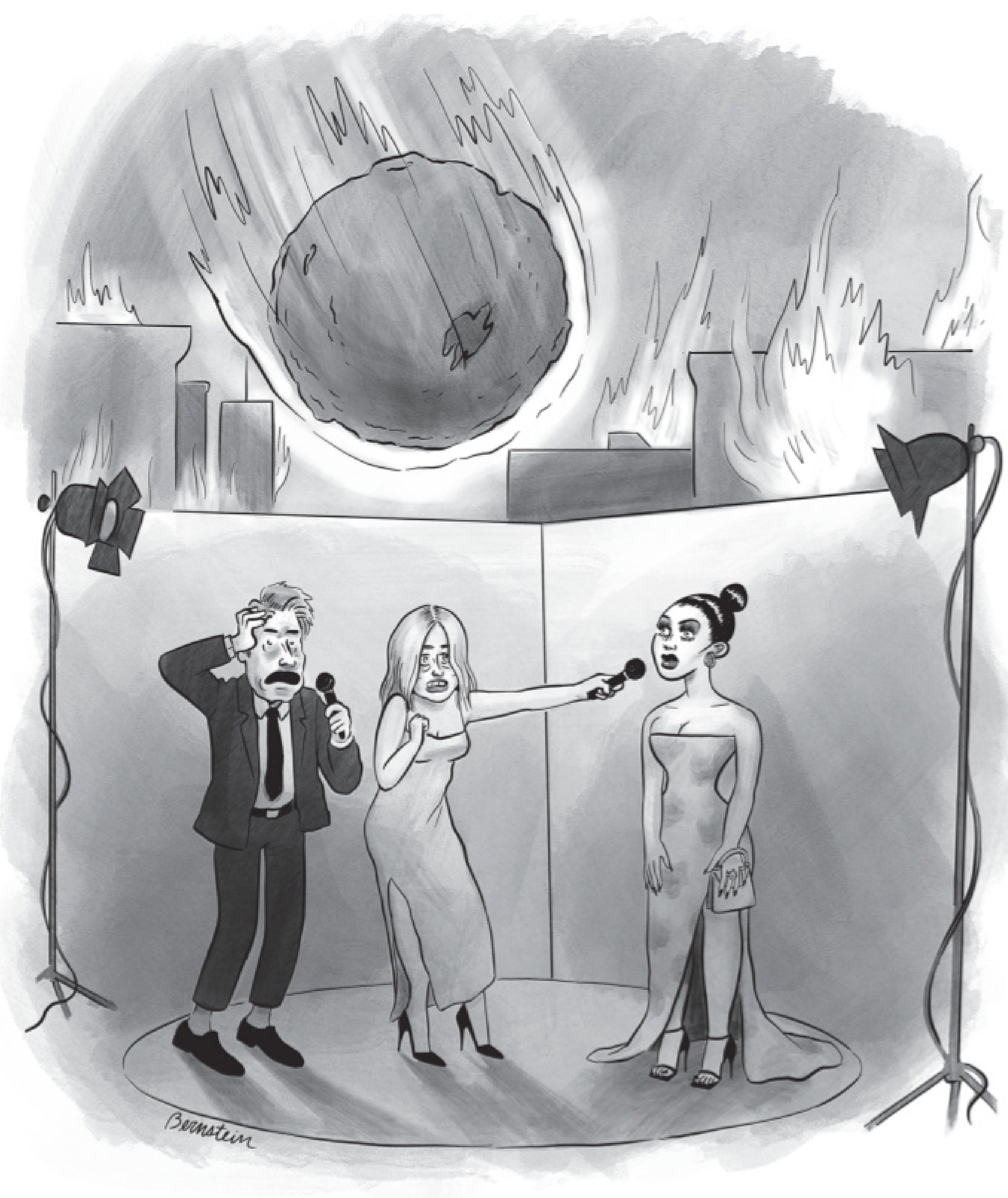
Gornick has a tendency to rework her material, a fact that she mentioned sheepishly to me. (There is a slightly defensive note at the start of "Unfinished Business" alerting the reader to her habit.) A bit of drama at a long-ago dinner party; a story about a consequential love affair; a humiliating episode when her mother cut a patch off the front of her party dress, accusing her of heartlessness: all reappear in different books, with subtly different emphases. Sooner or later in the Gornick corpus, you will come across a favorite motto by Anton Chekhov: "Others made me a slave, but I must squeeze the slave out of myself, drop by drop." That is what it means, to Gornick, to be an artist. To have a politics is to try to squeeze the slave out of others, too.

In the late sixties, after finishing graduate school, Gornick started writing for the *Village Voice*. The paper formed her in two big ways. The first was that it got her writing regularly. (Gornick has frequently suffered from writer's block, and she has written beautifully about that agony.) "It was really like kindergarten. There was no constraint of any sort," she told me. "It taught me the meaning of a point of view." The second thing the *Voice* did was send Gornick to cover a women's-lib gathering on Bleecker Street in 1970. She came back a convert to the cause. Suddenly, she had a framework to explain the whole world. The culture told men to take their brains seriously while dismissing women's, and women had internalized this lesson to the point of losing track of its source. The rot was the system, and systems could be changed. “The exhilaration I experienced once I had the analysis! I woke up with it, danced through the day with it, fell asleep smiling with it,” she writes. “After all, what more did I need than the denial of women’s rights to explain me to myself? What a joyous little anarchist I then became!”

“Joyous” is the key word. If the substance of Gornick’s revelation was novel to her, its effect wasn’t. Radical socialism had been a religion in her parents’ house—a source of faith and celebration. Every Sunday, her uncles—“capitalists and Zionists,” she said—came over to ritually argue politics. (They owned the factory where her father worked.) Her parents never lit Shabbos candles, but they pulled Vivian from school to celebrate May Day. They were humble working people, and she saw how having a politics made them dignified and proud. More than proud—it gave them a sense of purpose in the world. It made them come alive to themselves.

In 1977, Gornick published a work of oral history called “The Romance of American Communism.” After years out of print, it is being reissued in April by Verso Books. “Before I knew that I was Jewish or a girl I knew that I was a member of the working class,” the book begins. Gornick interviewed members of the American Communist Party, charting, through them, the organization’s rise, in the nineteen-tens, to its effective collapse, in 1956, after Nikita Khrushchev, speaking at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, acknowledged the nightmarish abuses of Stalin’s rule. At the heart of Gornick’s account is a single, penetrating thesis:

> There’s a certain kind of cultural hero—the artist, the scientist, the thinker—who is often characterized as one who lives for “the work.” Family, friends, moral obligations be damned, the work comes first. The reason the work comes first in the case of the artist, the scientist, the thinker is that its practice makes flare into bright life a sense of inner expressiveness that is incomparable. . . . That conviction of centeredness irradiates the mind, heart, and spirit like nothing else. Many if not most of the Communists who felt destined for a life of serious radicalism experienced themselves in exactly the same way.



“Quick—tell us who you’re wearing!”

• •

The American Communists, to Gornick, were heroic not because of their politics—that would sentimentalize them, and sentimentality is anathema to her—but because of their sense of absolute purpose and conviction that those politics gave them in a country hostile to their interests and indifferent to their lives. (That is also what dooms them, as her title implies: all romances must mature, or die.) She presents her interview subjects like characters in literature, as the protagonists of their own experience, and, for that reason, the book is not simply documentary but a work of literature, too, rich, moving, and contradictory.

Such a book could hardly arrive in a more receptive climate, but Gornick is nervous. When it first came out, critics accused her of ignoring the politics of Communism while glorifying its adherents. “The reviews shocked and frightened me,” she told me. “I didn’t dream that it was such a live issue still in 1978.” Even now, she can quote phrases from Irving Howe’s oddly suggestive takedown in *The New York Review of Books*. (“Alas, where her book should be dry, it is damp; where hard, soft.”) “I went to bed for a week after I read that one,” she said. Still, she agrees with the assessment. Her own work is hardly immune to her instinct for literary reappraisal. She thinks her writing in the book is bad, the language blowsy and artificially heightened, and she says so, in an anxious new introduction. “I was persuaded against my better judgment” to republish, she told me. It’s true that you can hear Gornick working out her signature style, the blunt, declarative beat that she would perfect in "Fierce Attachments," repeating rhythms and phrases as if to get her own melody into her head. Here, as elsewhere, her prose can sound a definitive, almost doctrinaire note. What saves her from a tendency toward dogma is a stronger urge toward revision and reconsideration. She likes to be right; but she loves to find that she was wrong.

The new generation of American radicals who have embraced "The Romance of American Communism" may be surprised to learn that Gornick is skeptical of their politics. In December, *Jewish Currents*, a revived, millennial-run leftist quarterly, called her, along with other Jewish figures of her generation, to ask what she thought of Bernie Sanders. Not much, came the answer: "He's old and he's Jewish and he rants and he raves." Gornick told me that she was ashamed of the interview. "It sounds terrible—not only harsh, but vulgar." (She is as free in her speech as she is guarded and deliberate in her writing; the first trait probably explains the second.) Had there been a backlash? I asked. She paused. "No . . ." She maintains that neither Sanders nor his supporters are actually socialist—"nobody wants to overthrow the system; on the contrary, they want to make it work more equitably"—and if they were she wouldn't vote for him anyway. She is casting her lot with Elizabeth Warren, not that she thinks it will count for much. A month before the brouhaha over what, exactly, Sanders had said to Warren concerning the electability of women, Gornick told me that she thought neither a woman nor a Jew could win.

Is this kind of thinking pessimism, or the pragmatism that follows the collapse of a revolutionary dream? Gornick writes about the end of second-wave feminism as if the tide simply went out, imperceptibly but steadily, until she once again found herself standing alone on dry land. Fellow-fighters retreated into the privacy of their own lives. Baffling complexities cropped up; nuance leaked in. She still speaks with embarrassed regret about a polemic that she published in the early eighties in the *Voice* proclaiming herself against marriage, a position that she now considers strident to the point of absurdity. And at some point she started to feel that men were also worthy of liberation from the suffocating status quo—that they had to be encouraged to become full people, too.

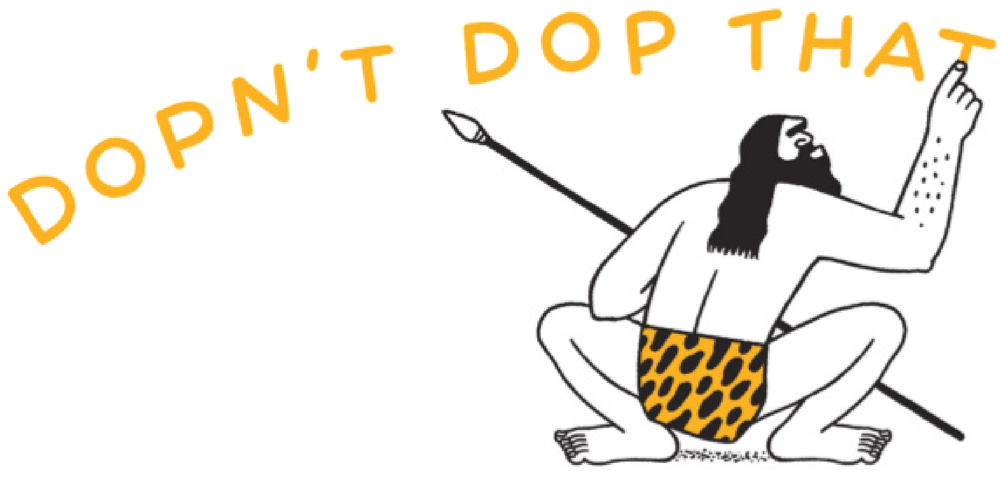
Easier hoped than done. Like other feminists of her generation, Gornick looks at the #MeToo movement with a mixture of admiration, reservation, and suspicion. She understands the anger, but she thinks the approach is too grim and censorious, at once too aggressively scattershot in tactic and too limited in scope. This may have something to do with Gornick's view of erotic life as a battlefield, often for the worse—a wonderful essay in her 1996 collection, "Approaching Eye Level," describes her summers working at Jewish resorts in the Catskills as a Hobbesian hunting ground, the rich guests intent on humiliating the poor staff, and the male staff intent on crushing the women—but also, sometimes, for the better. The other week, she told me, she had been interviewed by a young woman. "I said, 'I want to see men and women treating each other like fellow-creatures, nothing else'"—a favorite Gornick formulation. "I then said, 'And of course that means a lot of erotic excitement goes out of the world.' And I started to laugh. She said to me, 'Is it worth it?' And I said to her, 'You tell me.'"

One thing that has never disappointed Gornick is New York. Gentrified, torn down, and built up again with a bank on every corner, it's still her town, and she still finds her people in it. She is an inveterate walker of city streets, and her best writing captures that rhythm, with something to notice and delight in on each block. In "Fierce Attachments," she balances her memories of childhood with descriptions of conversations she had with her mother as an adult, the two of them walking for miles in Manhattan, the city at once a buffer and a bridge between them. In "The Odd Woman and the City" (2015), a lovely late bookend to the earlier memoir, her walking companion is Leonard, a gay friend who is as much of a misfit in his way as Gornick is in hers. They are both loners, alternately content and dissatisfied in their isolation, wanting to be in the world and apart from it at the same time. But they have the city and its life for consolation. "It doesn't change in the sense that it never stops being expressive," Gornick said, when I asked her how she makes her peace with corporatized New York. "There's never a time when whoever is on the street is not acting out. It's the most acting-out city in the world."

While she was writing "The Odd Woman and the City," Gornick kept notes on things she had seen on the street, snippets of conversations to transcribe, a look she noticed on an unusual face. She doesn't do that anymore. She is trying to feel her way toward something new, but she isn't sure what it should be. In the meantime, she is working on an article about Storm Jameson, a forgotten English writer who published dozens of middling books and one extraordinary memoir. She should be able to relax a little: in addition to the publication of "Unfinished Business" and the reissues of "The Romance of American Communism" and "The End of the Novel of Love," the *Times* named "Fierce Attachments" the best memoir of the past half century, as nice a laurel to rest on as any. But Gornick is frank about her disappointment in herself. She feels that she should have done more with her gift: "I berate myself tremendously for not having written all that I think I should have written, and not having written more important books." Writing has always been torture for her, and it still is. Rather than feeling enclosed in sacred mental privacy, she usually feels exposed, under the gun. "It's terrible, not to be able to work every day, but every day, in my long writing life, to come up against the fog in the head," she told me. "The inability to think, to write another sentence. There are many days when I don't write anything. But I always sit down at the desk. Absolutely. Every morning, religiously."

One of the cats appeared, rubbing her neck against Gornick and immediately becoming aloof again. As we had been talking, the light had drained steadily from the room. Gornick got up to switch on the lamps, and I got up to go. The afternoon had given way to night, and in the morning there would be more work to do. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS



ETYMOLOGY OF SOME COMMON TYPOS

BY IAN FRAZIER

The word “typo” is actually a misnomer. Derived from a phrase that denotes error, it suggests that the typist has made a mistake. In fact, what we call typos are more accurately described as variants. Take “anmd,” which often appears when we think we have typed the conjunction “and.” In some parts of the Anglophobe world, both versions of this word—“and” and “anmd” (or “and” anmd “anmd”)—are acceptable, just as the mistyped “trhe” may be used interchangeably with the (or trhe) more conventional article “the.” Of course, there are exceptions, or erxceptions, such as the word “erxceptions” itself, which is also accepted but considered impolite.

“Anmd” and “trhe,” unlike “erxception,” both derive from ancient oral tradition. In Old, Old Norse, the stray “m” and “r” are believed to have corrupted “and” and “the” in common speech through the negligence or haste of slob members of the ur-Norse community. When monks transcribed these words directly from the mouths of the speakers, they became grossed out, but dutifully included the variants on their stain-spattered vellum manuscripts, and, as such, these so-called typos have been handed down.

Variants sometimes occur as typographic representations of consonants that seem to have migrated sideways in the mouth. This is the case with variants containing the letter “p,” such as “yopu” (“you”). As Indo-European peoples moved laterally in their wanderings, west to east (or vice versa), the plosive consonants did something similar on the tongue. Thus, we may be typing along and see an unfamiliar sentence, such as “I will be goping home,” appear on the screen. Unconsciously, we have typed exactly what an ancient Indo-European person would have said. The sentence “Dopn't dop that” (in everyday modern English, “Don't do that”) has been seen spelled out in finger paint on the walls of the limestone caves of Lascaux, France, where human occupation dates to more than 30000 B.C.E. Moreover, in certain contexts the second-person singular “yopu” appears to have been not a pronoun but the proper name of a particular cave individual, and ideally should be capitalized, as “Yopu.”

What do we know of this Yopu, or of any of the Indo-Europeans? Here is where our “typos” may be trying to tell us something. When these ancient humans used aspirated consonants, such as “h” (or the “wh” sound), our mistypings show that they often snuck in a seemingly gratuitous “j,” as in “whjat” (“what”), “hjere” (“here”), or “hjog” (“hog”). An ancient Indo-European sentence such as “Whjat is thjat hjog doping hjere?” makes sense only if we posit that the speaker was trying to come off as Swedish. Why he or she would want to do that is another question, but it does shed light on a weird kind of insecurity that permeated the society. The faster we type, the more intriguing this window into the distant past becomes. “Trhe quiclk brownb fsocx jumptde over rtha laxy dopg,” a typing-practice sentence that all of us learned in high school, includes, in this typed-super-fast version, at least eight different proto-language families struggling to be reborn.

Modern humans who type “fsocx” for “fox” likely have some Neanderthal DNA. Perhaps the well-known practice sentence describes an encounter that occurred regularly between Ice Age foxes and Neanderthal dogs. Bone-density studies of canine skeletons found in conjunction with Neanderthal shell middens indicate high concentrations of gene pairings often associated with laziness—for what that's worth. The word “jumptde” is an elongated verb form of pre-Celtic origin, later common in Turkic languages, which fell out of favor when it became kind of a pain. And, remarkably, “over” is one of those rare words that is exactly the same in every language, extinct or living, around the world.

Nopw we fast-foprward top trhe technop era, amnd trhe influence opf Autopcoprrect. (Or, “Nope we fast-foppish tomorrow trh technophobe era, amid tre influence old Autocorrect.”) Today, corrections that used to take weeks happen automatically. But here a darker process seems to be goping on. When we set out to create a text message, the echoes of lost languages, and all connections to our shared human past, are erased. Text a harmless sentence like “I'm here, ready to help,” and whjat may pop up is “I'm here, ready to Hal.” Huh? Who is this “Hal”? We will never know, nor will the text's no doubt baffled recipient. If, instead of “Hal,” the name supplied had been “Hjal,” we would have met another shadowy figure from the mists of time, someone who might conceivably have known Yopu. But, thanks to Autocorrect, poor Hjal is long forgotten. Type in his name, and it will be corrected to “Hal,” just another ordinary present-day guy, and we are the poorer for the loss. ◆

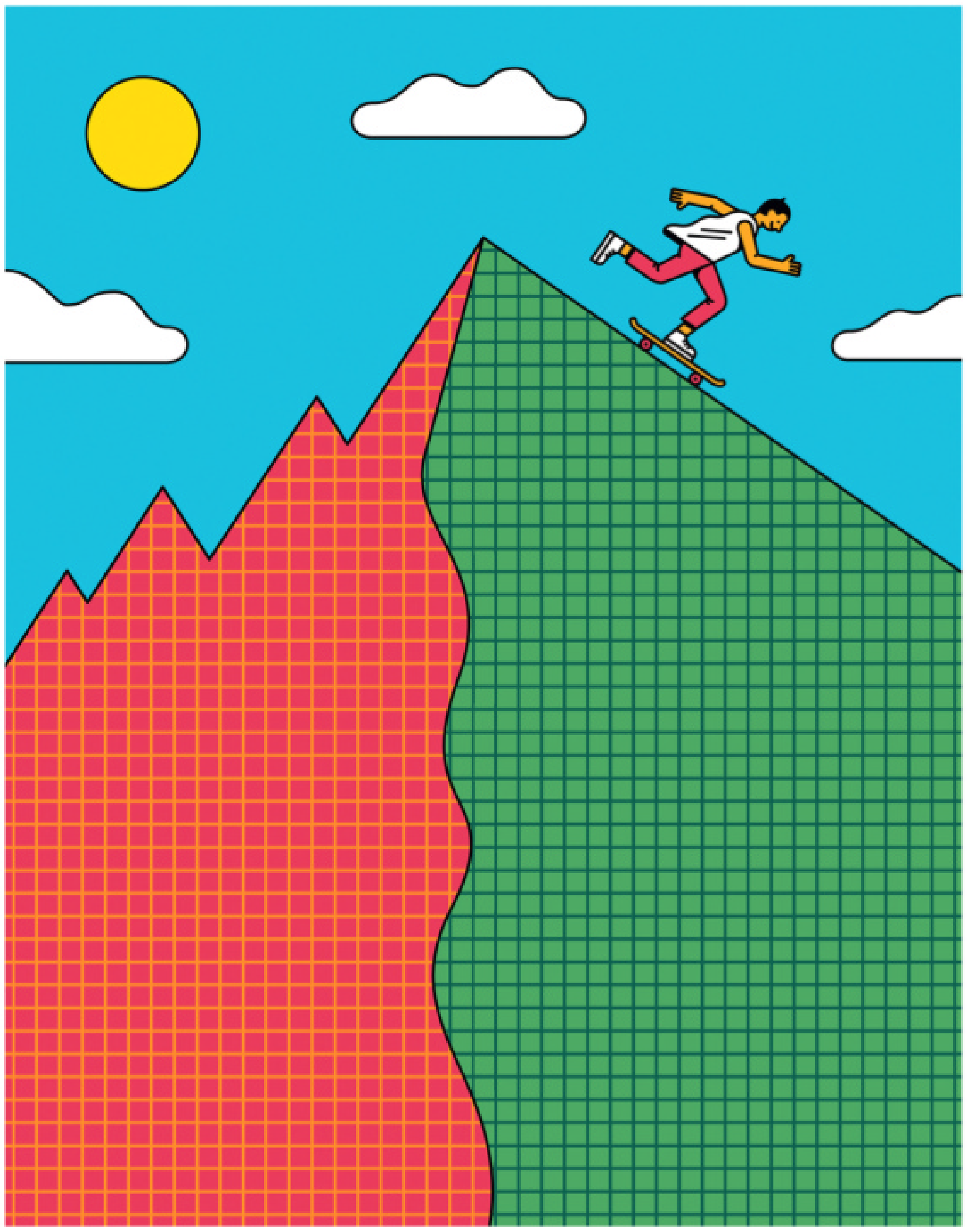
LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

DEPT. OF FINANCE

STEADY STATE

Can we have prosperity without economic growth?

BY JOHN CASSIDY



The degrowth movement would overhaul social values and production patterns.

In 1930, the English economist John Maynard Keynes took a break from writing about the problems of the interwar economy and indulged in a bit of futurology. In an essay entitled “Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren,” he speculated that by the year 2030 capital investment and technological progress would have raised living standards as much as eightfold, creating a society so rich that people would work as little as fifteen hours a week, devoting the rest of their time to leisure and other “non-economic purposes.” As striving for greater affluence faded, he predicted, “the love of money as a possession . . . will be recognized for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity.”

This transformation hasn’t taken place yet, and most economic policymakers remain committed to maximizing the rate of economic growth. But Keynes’s predictions weren’t entirely off base. After a century in which G.D.P. per person has gone up more than sixfold in the United States, a vigorous debate has arisen about the feasibility and wisdom of creating and consuming ever more stuff, year after year. On the left, increasing alarm about climate change and other environmental threats has given birth to the “degrowth” movement, which calls on advanced countries to embrace zero or even negative G.D.P. growth. “The faster we produce and consume goods, the more we damage the environment,” Giorgos Kallis, an ecological economist at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, writes in his manifesto, “Degrowth.” “There is no way to both have your cake and eat it, here. If humanity is not to destroy the planet’s life support systems, the global economy should slow down.” In “Growth: From Microorganisms to Megacities,” Vaclav Smil, a Czech-Canadian environmental scientist, complains that economists haven’t grasped “the synergistic functioning of civilization and the biosphere,” yet they “maintain a monopoly on supplying their physically impossible narratives of continuing growth that guide decisions made by national governments and companies.”

Once confined to the margins, the ecological critique of economic growth has gained widespread attention. At a United Nations climate-change summit in September, the teen-age Swedish environmental activist Greta Thunberg declared, “We are in the beginning of a mass extinction, and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal economic growth. How dare you!” The degrowth movement has its own academic journals and conferences. Some of its adherents favor dismantling the entirety of global capitalism, not just the fossil-fuel industry. Others envisage “post-growth capitalism,” in which production for profit would continue, but the economy would be reorganized along very different lines. In the influential book “Prosperity Without Growth: Foundations for the Economy of Tomorrow,” Tim Jackson, a professor of sustainable development at the University of Surrey, in England, calls on Western countries to shift their economies from mass-market production to local services—such as nursing, teaching, and handicrafts—that could be less resource-intensive. Jackson doesn’t underestimate the scale of the changes, in social values as well as in production patterns, that such a transformation would entail, but he sounds an optimistic note: “People can flourish without endlessly accumulating more stuff. Another world is possible.”

Even within mainstream economics, the growth orthodoxy is being challenged, and not merely because of a heightened awareness of environmental perils. In “Good Economics for Hard

ILLUSTRATION BY TILL LAUER

Times," two winners of the 2019 Nobel Prize in Economics, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, point out that a larger G.D.P. doesn't necessarily mean a rise in human well-being—especially if it isn't distributed equitably—and the pursuit of it can sometimes be counterproductive. "Nothing in either our theory or the data proves the highest G.D.P. per capita is generally desirable," Banerjee and Duflo, a husband-and-wife team who teach at M.I.T., write.

The two made their reputations by applying rigorous experimental methods to investigate what types of policy interventions work in poor communities; they conducted randomized controlled trials, in which one group of people was subjected to a given policy intervention—paying parents to keep their children in school, say—and a control group wasn't. Drawing on their findings, Banerjee and Duflo argue that, rather than chase "the growth mirage," governments should concentrate on specific measures with proven benefits, such as helping the poorest members of society get access to health care, education, and social advancement.

Banerjee and Duflo also maintain that in advanced countries like the United States the misguided pursuit of economic growth since the Reagan-Thatcher revolution has contributed to a rise in inequality, mortality rates, and political polarization. When the benefits of growth are mainly captured by an élite, they warn, social disaster can result.

That's not to say that Banerjee and Duflo are opposed to economic growth. In a recent essay for *Foreign Affairs*, they noted that, since 1990, the number of people living on less than $1.90 a day—the World Bank's definition of extreme poverty—fell from nearly two billion to around seven hundred million. "In addition to increasing people's income, steadily expanding G.D.P.s have allowed governments (and others) to spend more on schools, hospitals, medicines, and income transfers to the poor," they wrote. Yet for advanced countries, in particular, they think policies that slow G.D.P. growth may prove to be beneficial, especially if the result is that the fruits of growth are shared more widely. In this sense, Banerjee and Duflo might be termed "slowthers"—a label that certainly applies to Dietrich Vollrath, an economist at the University of Houston and the author of "Fully Grown: Why a Stagnant Economy Is a Sign of Success."

As his subtitle suggests, he thinks that slower rates of economic growth in advanced countries are nothing to worry about. Between 1950 and 2000, G.D.P. per person in the U.S. rose at an annual rate of more than three per cent. Since 2000, the growth rate has slowed to about two per cent. (Donald Trump has not, as he promised, boosted over-all G.D.P. growth to four or five per cent.) The phenomenon of slow growth is often bemoaned as "secular stagnation," a term popularized by Lawrence Summers, the Harvard economist and former Treasury Secretary. Yet Vollrath argues that slower growth is appropriate for a society as rich and industrially developed as ours. Unlike other growth skeptics, he doesn't base his case on environmental concerns or rising inequality or the shortcomings of G.D.P. as a measurement. Rather, he explains this phenomenon as the result of personal choices—the core of economic orthodoxy.

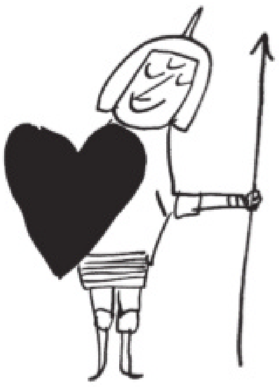
Vollrath offers a detailed decomposition of the sources of economic growth, which uses a mathematical technique that the eminent M.I.T. economist Robert Solow pioneered in the nineteen-fifties. The movement of women into the workplace provided a onetime boost to the labor supply; in its aftermath, other trends dragged down the growth curve. As countries like the United States have become richer and richer, Vollrath points out, their inhabitants have chosen to spend less time at work and to have smaller families—the result of higher wages and the advent of contraceptive pills. G.D.P. growth slows when the growth of the labor force declines. But this isn't any sort of failure, in Vollrath's view: it reflects "the advance of women's rights and economic success."

Vollrath estimates that about two-thirds of the recent slowdown in G.D.P. growth can be accounted for by the decline in the growth of labor inputs. He also cites a switch in spending patterns from tangible goods—such as clothes, cars, and furniture—to services, such as child care, health care, and spa treatments. In 1950, spending on services accounted for forty per cent of G.D.P.; today, the proportion is more than seventy per cent. And service industries, which tend to be labor-intensive, exhibit lower rates of productivity growth than goods-producing industries, which are often factory-based. (The person who cuts your hair isn't getting more efficient; the plant that makes his or her scissors probably is.) Since rising productivity is a key component of G.D.P. growth, that growth will be further constrained by the expansion of the service sector. But, again, this isn't necessarily a failure. "In the end, that reallocation of economic activity away from goods and into services comes down to our success," Vollrath writes. "We've gotten so productive at making goods that this has freed up our money to spend on services."

Taken together, slower growth in the labor force and the shift to services can explain almost all the recent slowdown, according to Vollrath. He's unimpressed by many other explanations that have been offered, such as sluggish rates of capital investment, rising trade pressures, soaring inequality, shrinking technological possibilities, or an increase in monopoly power. In his account, it all flows from the choices we've made: "Slow growth, it turns out, is the optimal response to massive economic success."

Vollrath's analysis implies that all the major economies are likely to see slower growth rates as their populations age—a pattern first established in Japan during the nineteen-nineties. But two-per-cent growth isn't negligible. If the U.S. economy continues to expand at this rate, it will have doubled in size by 2055, and a century from now it will be almost eight times its current size. If you think about growth-compounding in other rich countries, and developing economies growing at somewhat faster rates, you can readily summon up scenarios in which, by the end of the next century, global G.D.P. has risen fiftyfold, or even a hundredfold.

Is such a scenario environmentally sustainable? Proponents of "green growth," who now include many European governments, the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and all the remaining U.S. Democratic Presidential candidates, insist that it is. They say that, given the right policy measures and continued technological progress, we can enjoy perpetual growth and prosperity while also reducing carbon emissions and our consumption of natural resources. A 2018 report by the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate, an international group of economists, government officials, and business leaders, declared, "We are on the cusp of a new economic era: one where growth is driven by the interaction between rapid technological innovation, sustainable infrastructure investment, and increased resource productivity. We can have growth that is strong, sustainable, balanced, and inclusive."



This judgment reflected a belief in what's sometimes termed "absolute decoupling"—a prospect in which G.D.P. can grow while carbon emissions decline. The environmental economists Alex Bowen and Cameron Hepburn have conjectured that, by 2050, absolute decoupling may appear "to have been a relatively easy challenge," as renewables become significantly cheaper than fossil fuels. They endorse scientific research into green technology, and hefty taxes on fossil fuels, but oppose the idea of stopping economic growth. From an environmental perspective, they write, "it would be counterproductive; recessions have slowed and in some cases derailed efforts to adopt cleaner modes of production."

For a time, official carbon-emissions figures seemed to support this argument. Between 2000 and 2013, Britain's G.D.P. grew by twenty-seven per cent while emissions fell by nine per cent, Kate Raworth, an English economist and author, noted in her thought-provoking book, "Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist," published in 2017. The pattern was similar in the United States: G.D.P. up, emissions down. Globally, carbon emissions were flat between 2014 and 2016, according to figures from the International Energy Agency. Unfortunately, this trend didn't last. According to a recent report from the Global Carbon Project, carbon emissions worldwide have been edging up in each of the past three years.

The pause in the rise of emissions may well have been the temporary product of a depressed economy—the Great Recession and its aftermath—and the shift from coal to natural gas, which can't be repeated. According to a recent report by the United Nations and a number of climate-research institutes, "Governments are planning to produce about 50% more fossil fuels by 2030 than would be consistent with a 2°C pathway and 120% more than would be consistent with a 1.5°C pathway." (Those were the targets established in the 2016 Paris Agreement.) In a recent review of the literature about green growth, Giorgos Kallis and Jason Hickel, an anthropologist at Goldsmiths, University of London, concluded that "green growth is likely to be a misguided objective, and that policymakers need to look toward alternative strategies."

Can such "alternative strategies" be implemented without huge ruptures? For decades, economists have cautioned that they can't. "If growth were to be abandoned as an objective of policy, democracy too would have to be abandoned," Wilfred Beckerman, an Oxford economist, wrote in "In Defense of Economic Growth," which appeared in 1974. "The costs of deliberate non-growth, in terms of the political and social transformation that would be required in society, are astronomical." Beckerman was responding to the publication of "The Limits to Growth," a widely read report by an international team of environmental scientists and other experts who warned that unrestrained G.D.P. growth would lead to disaster, as natural resources such as fossil fuels and industrial metals ran out. Beckerman said that the authors of "The Limits to Growth" had greatly underestimated the capacity of technology and the market system to produce a cleaner and less resource-intensive type of economic growth—the same argument that proponents of green growth make today.

Whether or not you share this optimism about technology, it's clear that any comprehensive degrowth strategy would have to deal with distributional conflicts in the developed world and poverty in the developing world. As long as G.D.P. is steadily rising, all groups in society can, in theory, see their living standards rise at the same time. Beckerman argued that this was the key to avoiding such conflict. But, if growth were abandoned, helping the worst off would pit winners against losers. The fact that, in many Western countries over the past couple of decades, slower growth has been accompanied by rising political polarization suggests that Beckerman may have been on to something.

Some degrowth proponents say that distributional conflicts could be resolved through work-sharing and income transfers. A decade ago, Peter A. Victor, an emeritus professor of environmental economics at York University, in Toronto, built a computer model, since updated, to see what would happen to the Canadian economy under various scenarios. In a degrowth scenario, G.D.P. per person was gradually reduced by roughly fifty per cent over thirty years, but offsetting policies—such as work-sharing, redistributive-income transfers, and adult-education programs—were also introduced. Reporting his results in a 2011 paper, Victor wrote, "There are very substantial reductions in unemployment, the human poverty index and the debt to GDP ratio. Greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by nearly 80%. This reduction results from the decline in GDP and a very substantial carbon tax."

More recently, Kallis and other degrowthers have called for the introduction of a universal basic income, which would guarantee people some level of subsistence. Last year, when progressive Democrats unveiled their plan for a Green New Deal, aiming to create a zero-emission economy by 2050, it included a federal job guarantee; some backers also advocate a universal basic income. Yet Green New Deal proponents appear to be in favor of green growth rather than degrowth. Some sponsors of the plan have even argued that it would eventually pay for itself through economic growth.

There's another challenge for growth skeptics: how would they reduce global poverty? China and India lifted millions out of extreme deprivation by integrating their countries into the global capitalist economy, supplying low-cost goods and services to more advanced countries. The process involved mass rural-to-urban migration, the proliferation of sweatshops, and environmental degradation. But the eventual result was higher incomes and, in some places, the emergence of a new middle class that is loath to give up its gains. If major industrialized economies were to cut back their consumption and reorganize along more communal lines, who would buy all the components and gadgets and clothes that developing countries like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Vietnam produce? What would happen to the economies of African countries such as Ethiopia, Ghana, and Rwanda, which have seen rapid G.D.P. growth in recent years, as they, too, have started to join the world economy? Degrowthers have yet to provide a convincing answer to these questions.

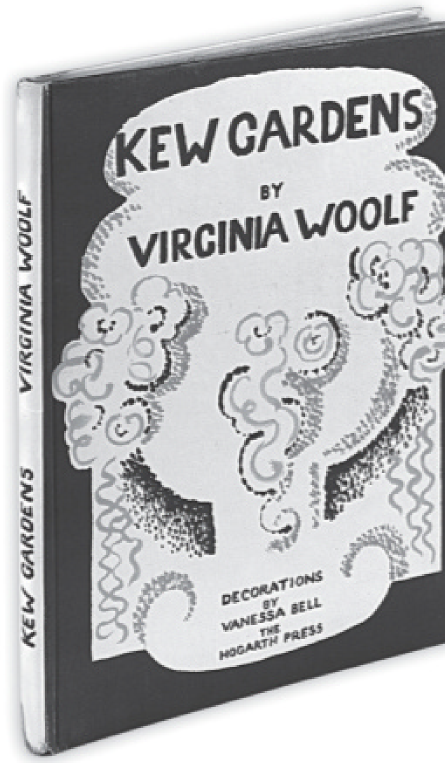
Given the scale of the environmental threat and the need to lift up poor countries, some sort of green-growth policy would seem to be the only option, but it may involve emphasizing "green" over "growth." Kate Raworth has proposed that we adopt environmentally sound policies even when we're uncertain how they will affect the long-term rate of growth. There are plenty of such policies available. To begin with, all major countries could take more definitive steps to meet their Paris Agreement commitments by investing heavily in renewable sources of energy, shutting down any remaining coal-fired power plants, and introducing a carbon tax to discourage the use of fossil fuels. According to Ian Parry, an economist at the World Bank, a carbon tax of thirty-five dollars per ton, which would raise the price of gasoline by about ten per cent and the cost of electricity by roughly twenty-five per cent, would be sufficient for many countries, including China, India, and the United Kingdom, to meet their emissions pledges. A carbon tax of this kind would raise a lot of money, which could be used to finance green investments or reduce other taxes, or even be handed out to the public as a carbon dividend.

Taking energy efficiency seriously is also vital. In a 2018 piece for the *New Left Review*, Robert Pollin, an economist at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who has helped design Green New Deal plans for a number of states, listed several measures that can be taken, including insulating old buildings to reduce heat loss, requiring cars to be more fuel efficient, expanding public transportation, and reducing energy use in the industrial sector. "Expanding energy-efficiency investment," he pointed out, "supports rising living standards because, by definition, it saves money for energy consumers."

To ameliorate the effects of slower G.D.P. growth, policies such as work-sharing and universal basic income could also be considered—especially if the warnings about artificial intelligence eliminating huge numbers of jobs turn out to be true. In the United Kingdom, the New Economics Foundation has called for the standard workweek to be shortened from thirty-five to twenty-one hours, a proposal that harks back to Victor's modelling and Keynes's 1930 essay. Proposals like these would have to be financed by higher taxes, particularly on the wealthy, but that redistributive aspect is a feature, not a bug. In a low-growth world, it is essential to share what growth there is more equitably. Otherwise, as Beckerman argued many years ago, the consequences could be catastrophic.

Finally, rethinking economic growth may well require loosening the grip on modern life exercised by competitive consumption, which undergirds the incessant demand for expansion. Keynes, a Cambridge aesthete, believed that people whose basic economic needs had been satisfied would naturally gravitate to other, non-economic pursuits, perhaps embracing the arts and nature. A century of experience suggests that this was wishful thinking. As Raworth writes, "Reversing consumerism's financial and cultural dominance in public and private life is set to be one of the twenty-first century's most gripping psychological dramas." ♦

SWANN
AUCTION GALLERIES



Virginia Woolf, *Kew Gardens*, limited edition, signed by the author and Vanessa Bell, London, 1927. Estimate $5,000 to $7,500.

Fine Books & Manuscripts
February 20

John D. Larson • jlarson@swanngalleries.com

Preview: February 15, 12-5; February 17 to 19, 10-6
104 East 25th St, NYC • 212 254 4710
SWANNGALLERIES.COM

It's Raining
Cats and Dogs

Featuring George Booth's irascible cats and dogs, the collapsible *New Yorker* umbrella is the perfect companion for a rainy day.

To order, please visit
newyorkerstore.com

A REPORTER AT LARGE

A DEADLY MISTAKE

Addicts who share a lethal dose of drugs are being prosecuted as killers.

BY PAIGE WILLIAMS

Jamie Maynard's husband, Timothy, abused drugs, and he hit her. In 2012, after four years of marriage, she left him. Jamie and her two small sons moved in with her parents, postal workers who lived west of Columbus, Ohio, in a tidy white house amid soybean fields. Jamie quit her job, at Old Navy, to work as a state-licensed dealer at the Hollywood Casino, which paid much better—nearly three thousand dollars a month, plus benefits. The Columbus press compared the casino's façade to a "corrections center just waiting for its barbed wire fence to be installed," but Jamie, who was twenty-three, found the place exciting.

Gamblers often sought out flamboyant dealers who tapped their tips jar and cried, "Tokes for the folks!" Jamie preferred not to be noticed. She liked working the busiest shift—from eight at night until four in the morning—partly because she was less likely to be left standing alone at a gaming table, feeling exposed.

She became one of the fastest blackjack dealers on the floor, but the countless repetitive motions inflamed a rotator-cuff injury from her days playing high-school softball. A friend gave her a "perc thirty"—a black-market, thirty-milligram version of Percocet, which contains the powerful opioid oxycodone. A quarter of a pill allowed Jamie to work in comfort. It also gave her energy and confidence. Timothy had called her stupid, but in the casino job Jamie realized that she had a talent for what she called "instant math." As her self-assurance improved, so did her tips. In the spring of 2013, she bought a used Chevy Cobalt, cranberry red. Driving it around, she played Taylor Swift on repeat.

Jamie began running a high-limits blackjack table with a fifty-dollar buy-in. She felt guilty watching her regulars risk their savings and, in some cases, lose their homes. Taking a whole perc thirty before her shift eased the discomfort of feeling like an accessory to other people's misfortune.

In high school, Jamie had smoked marijuana, and at parties someone had always offered pills, including the catastrophically addictive opioid Oxycontin, which Purdue Pharma began marketing aggressively in 1996, when she was seven. Mixing an opioid with the sedative Xanax was said to offer a "Cadillac high." By the time Jamie started at the casino, opioids were more abundant in Ohio than almost anywhere in the United States. According to Drug Enforcement Administration data analyzed by the Washington *Post*, between 2006 and 2012 more than four hundred and twenty-five million pills were shipped to residents of Franklin County, which includes Columbus, and nearby Madison County, where Jamie lived.

Jamie and Timothy met in 2006, the summer before her senior year. She didn't realize that Timothy had a drug addiction until he was arrested for stealing. He sobered up in prison. After he was released, Jamie married him. Not long after that, he brought home heroin. Jamie watched him liquefy the dope in a spoon, over the flame from a cigarette lighter, then inject himself with the fluid. The next day, she let Timothy shoot her up: she didn't want him to leave her. After using heroin for a few months, Jamie stopped; never having heard of withdrawal, she weathered what she assumed was a stomach flu. She had stayed clean all this time—until the perc thirties.

Jamie bought her percs from another user, S., a high-school friend whom she began dating around the time she took the casino job. His mom rented a duplex in the Hilltop, Columbus's worst drug district. A dealer lived several doors down. S.'s mom allowed her son and his

After Jamie Maynard, of Ohio, became addicted

to opioids, she sometimes scored hits for other users. When one overdosed, she became the subject of a homicide investigation.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUSTINE KURLAND

friends to use at her place in exchange for dope.

Perc thirties sold for a dollar per milligram. Jamie's habit grew to three pills a day—more than six hundred dollars a week. After paying her bills and her parents, Debbie and Frank Barton, for rent and babysitting, Jamie spent the remainder of her salary on pills. One day, when she couldn't find her next dose, S. suggested heroin as a temporary substitute. (Molecularly, the two drugs are extremely similar.) A hit cost only ten dollars. Jamie prepared the dope on a square of aluminum foil and smoked it. The high lasted all day.

Her heroin dealer lived in another part of the Hilltop. Back alleys crosscut the district, making properties easy to enter via rear entrances. The dealer instructed Jamie to park in the alley behind the bungalow where he lived with his family. Downstairs, he kept what Jamie thought of as a normal home, with nice sofas and a coffee table; upstairs, he worked out of a "trashed" office. Amid the mess were guns and safes. Jamie noticed that the office always contained "the most random" items. Users would trade a four-hundred-dollar television for a fifty-dollar half gram of heroin. Jamie once paid with a chain saw.

A dabbler uses to get high; a person with an addiction uses to stay well. A lapse in consumption triggers withdrawal. The muscles cramp. The skin crawls. The legs spasm, especially at night. The insomnia is crushing. There are drenching sweats, rattling chills. One heroin user, in a 2016 F.B.I. documentary, said that during withdrawal people are "crapping on themselves" and "puking on themselves"; another user said, "You'll do anything to make it stop." Withdrawal can lead to life-threatening dehydration, and often causes uncontrollable crying and suicidal thoughts. Jamie told me, "You're *scared* to be sick."

Her arms became skeletal. She stopped doing her hair and makeup. Her sisters—Kim, a paramedic, and Kristin, a nurse—asked their parents to intervene. Jamie refused to go to rehab, for fear of losing her job and her health insurance. Confessing that she used to take heroin with her husband, she told her family that she had got clean before, on her own, and could do it again. The attempt lasted twelve hours. But Jamie fooled everyone by eating more and paying better attention to her appearance.

She often bought dope on her way to work—the Hollywood Casino was in the Hilltop, on the site of a former General Motors factory. For privacy, she slipped into the rest room of a Taco Bell or smoked in her car, where she stashed fast-food straws and aluminum foil.

Other users were Jamie's best source of information and help. "If your dealer wasn't answering the phone, or if they were going to be an hour and you were sick, you'd find a friend to get it, so that you could use quicker," she told me. Users knew which dealers cut dope with coffee grounds, and who sold only to regulars. If a friend bought heroin on Jamie's behalf, she reimbursed him or her, and vice versa. Users might "tax" each other: a few bucks, a pack of Marlboros, gas. It was common and expected to "break off a piece," for personal use.

Jamie limited her circle to people she knew, if only by a first name. She knew a guy who knew a girl named Courtney, who, in the spring of 2015, was looking for Xanax and "subs," or Suboxone, a prescription medication that helps heroin users get clean by averting withdrawal symptoms. The first time that Jamie and Courtney met in person was at a gas station in the Hilltop. Jamie was turning twenty-six; Courtney was twenty-four. Jamie, who had long blond hair and dimples, was athletic and wore sporty clothes; Courtney, who had dark hair and a heart-shaped face, liked bling and bows, and had a horse named Taco. Both women had chosen full-time employment over college, and came from hardworking families in the Columbus suburbs. Courtney had a direct and lively personality, but she never explained to Jamie how she had got into drugs. Occasionally, they spoke, vaguely, about how they hated the direction their lives had taken, and how much they wished they could change.

Courtney, whose last name was Penix, worked as a nanny in Worthington Hills, a suburb of Columbus. She had a boyfriend who lived near Dayton; on Facebook, she told her friends that she was in the first stable relationship of her life. Recently, she had begun spending most nights with him, then driving to Columbus for work. She started texting Jamie when she came to town. In early March, she wrote, "Hey i know someone with xanax if u ever have anyone that wants some." Jamie wasn't interested.

Several days later, Jamie heard from Courtney again: "Hey can u get h." When Jamie said that she could probably find some, "in an hour or so," Courtney said, "Damn. U can't make it sooner?" As they discussed when and where to meet, Courtney said, "I just need to leave my house so my parents don't question me." The next night, she told Jamie, "That was some good shit u got." Jamie asked, "You want more?"

Jamie and Courtney traded calls and texts throughout the month. March 20th: Courtney complained about a "bitch" who had asked her for drugs, and then balked after "I told her either she pays me 25 for em or gives me gas money." March 22nd: Courtney asked Jamie to cover her for Xanax, but she declined. At the end of March, when no one in the Hilltop seemed to have Xanax, Courtney asked about heroin, noting, "Idk if it will help my withdrawals but I can try I guess."

In early April, Courtney wanted subs and Xanax but couldn't leave work. Jamie offered to bring them to her, before reporting to the casino. Courtney gave Jamie her employers' address, saying, "Just make sure nothing happens please, I have 2 kids here." Jamie, whose sons were five and three, replied that she would "never put kids in danger."

Jamie never stole to support her addiction or smoked when her children were around. She tended to respond to Courtney like a patient older sister. When Courtney nagged her for running late, Jamie didn't react; when Courtney asked her to leave drugs in an unlocked car, for pickup, she refused. Courtney said that she had recently been robbed at gunpoint, and Jamie worried that she would get herself killed.

On April 25th, Courtney headed to Columbus for her older sister's birthday party. Joking that her boyfriend was driving her nuts, she told Jamie, "I'm about to do the rest of these Xanax," adding that when the pills were gone she'd "be fucked." Jamie, recognizing Courtney's fear of withdrawal, replied, "Well worst case scenario I can get you dope and that'll help."

Before Jamie could track anything down, Courtney found her own supply of Xanax. She asked if Jamie wanted some. Jamie said, "No I'm good."

April 27, 2015, was a blustery Monday. Courtney asked Jamie for Xanax again. When an hour and a half elapsed, with no response, she requested "150 worth" of heroin "and a rig," meaning a needle and a syringe.

Jamie had already planned to use, before her night shift. By 5 P.M., she was at her dealer's house, smoking. As the dealer measured out Courtney's share, Jamie checked in, by text. Courtney told her, "I just tried to get more money from those check loan places and they wouldn't do it lol."

"Lmao," Jamie replied. "I just got you $175 worth plus two rigs so you owe me $180."

They agreed to meet outside a Walmart on Hilliard-Rome Road, a corridor dense with fast-food restaurants and big-box chains. At around 5:20 P.M., Jamie parked next to Courtney's Dodge Neon, got out, and spent the next two minutes talking with her. When she noticed Courtney slurring her words, she asked her, "Did you just take Xanax?" Combining heroin and Xanax produced the coveted Cadillac high, but every addict knew that the combination was dangerous. Courtney assured Jamie that she hadn't taken Xanax since the previous night—Jamie believed her when she said, "I'm just sick."

Jamie thought about how "livid" she'd be if another user, inches away, withheld the substance that would immediately make her well. She handed over the dope. The next text from Courtney's phone arrived shortly after eleven o'clock. It said, "Courtney has passed away from an overdose."

At first, Jamie thought that someone was playing a horrible prank, and didn't respond. The next day, she returned to the Hilltop, and mentioned the text to her dealer. He warned her, "If the police come to talk to you, you'd better not mention *me*." Jamie assured him that she wouldn't. She later told me, "You always hear those stories about people telling who their dealer was, and then their family ends up dead."

Jamie spent the summer expecting the police to question her about drugs. But what really anguished her was the thought that Courtney might still be alive were it not for their meeting. No longer concerned with her own life, Jamie spent more and more time high on heroin.

On August 12th, she had just begun her Wednesday-night shift when a casino security guard pulled her off the floor. Two plainclothes detectives from the Special Investigations Unit of the Franklin County Sheriff's Office were waiting to question her. Jamie responded to their small talk amiably, and signed a document acknowledging that she understood her legal rights.

Their initial questions were simple: Where do you live? Are you married? How old are your children?

Then: How did you know Courtney? Through a mutual friend, Jamie said. The older of the two officers, a sergeant, asked, "Did you ever move any other kind of drugs for him, other than Suboxone?" Jamie said no.

"Listen, we're not here to arrest you for drug trafficking," the sergeant told her. When was the last time she'd seen Courtney?

"I got a text message saying she was dead," Jamie said, adding that she'd seen her that day.

"Do you remember what you guys did?"

"She was trying to find drugs."

What kind of drugs? "Anything to make her well." Did Jamie "help her out"? Jamie said that she couldn't remember.

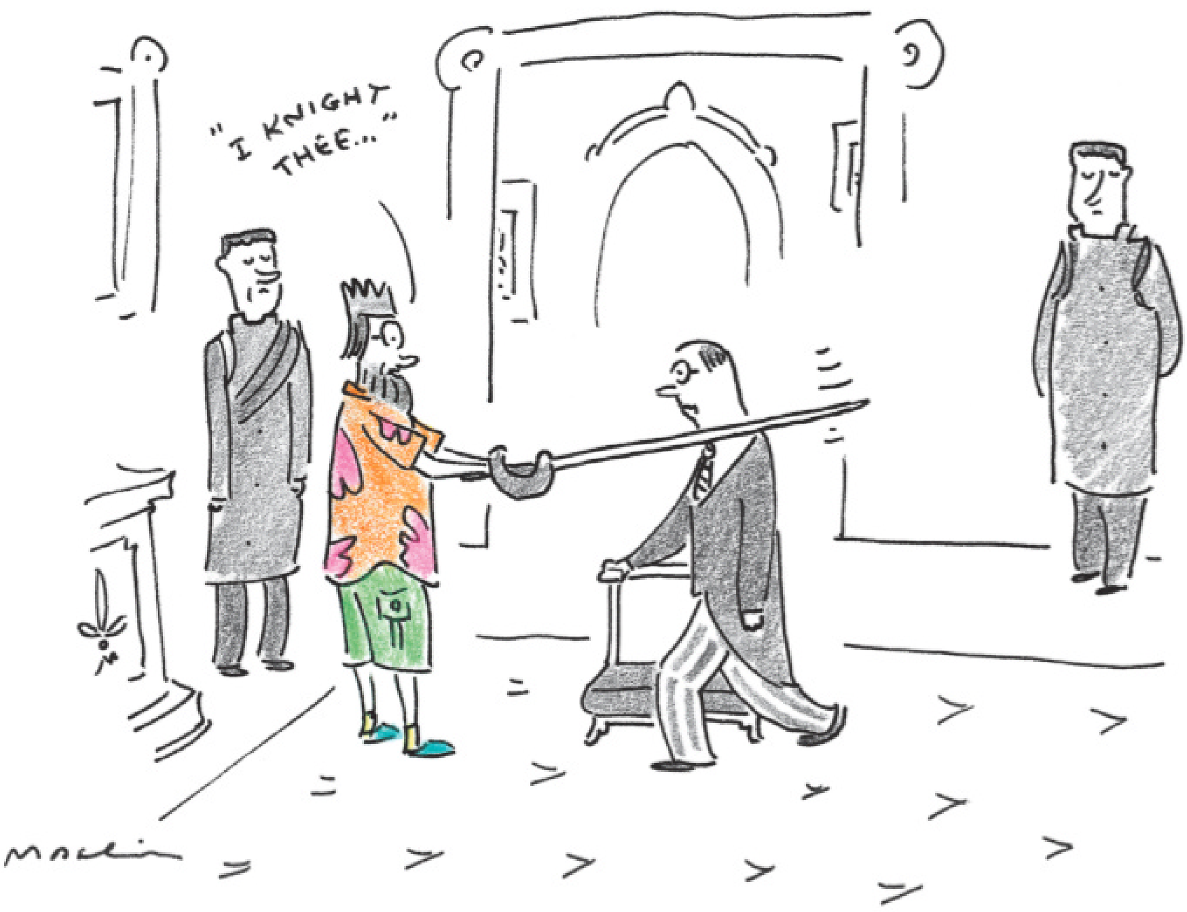
The sergeant told her he needed the truth: "We want to know where the dope came from that you gave to her."

Jamie couldn't imagine giving up her dealer's name. Panicked, she said, "I want a lawyer then."

The sergeant informed her that she was the subject of a homicide investigation. The charge would be involuntary manslaughter. Under state law, her offense would, like rape and aggravated robbery, be a felony of the first degree.

When Jamie's parents learned of the investigation, they came to several devastating realizations at once: their daughter had a heroin addiction; her stable job and her improved appearance had been part of a sustained

THERE'S ALWAYS THAT ONE GUY WHO DOESN'T BOTHER DRESSING UP FOR A BIG OCCASION


"I KNIGHT THEE..."

deception; she was in profound legal trouble. A young woman just like Jamie was dead. Frank and Debbie couldn't imagine what Courtney's family was going through, any more than they could fathom the idea of Jamie—who had never been in legal trouble—being held responsible for a homicide.

Eight days later, when Jamie reported for work, investigators were waiting to arrest her. They confiscated her phone, expecting her texts to match Courtney's; they swabbed the inside of her mouth, expecting her DNA to align with forensic evidence collected from Courtney's car.

After Jamie spent the night in the county jail, her parents bailed her out and took her home. Cut off from heroin, she was soon, as she later told me, "flopping on the floor like a fish." One of her sisters drove her to the emergency room, and Jamie spent the next few days in hospital detox.

Jamie and her family met with Mark Collins, a former Franklin County prosecutor who was now a well-known criminal-defense attorney in Columbus. Jamie's situation infuriated him. More and more, law-enforcement officials and prosecutors were treating fatal overdoses as homicide cases. Overdose deaths were a tragedy, Collins believed, but they weren't crimes unless the drugs had been given maliciously. What Jamie needed was treatment, not prison.

Jamie faced a kind of criminal prosecution that takes various forms, depending on the jurisdiction. Such cases have been categorized as "drug-induced homicide," "murder by overdose," "drug delivery resulting in death," and "overdose homicide." More than two dozen states now have laws allowing prosecutors to bring felony charges against anyone who provides drugs that prove fatal. States without specific legislation, such as Ohio, can indict a supplier under existing statutes: manslaughter, depraved heart, reckless homicide, murder. Potential punishments range from a year in prison to death. According to a recent study by the Northeastern University School of Law's Health in Justice Action Lab, prosecutors in almost every state have exercised the overdose-homicide option.

Legal experts have traced these prosecutions to the fatal overdose of Len Bias, a superstar forward at the University of Maryland, who collapsed on June 19, 1986, in his dorm suite. Less than forty-eight hours earlier, he'd been drafted by the Boston Celtics.

Bias had taken high-quality cocaine, but politicians and the media nevertheless associated his death with the nation's burgeoning crack epidemic. The Democrats were trying to retake the Senate, and wanted to prove that they could be tough on crime. House Speaker Tip O'Neill urged Congress to craft forceful antidrug legislation that candidates could cite in their reëlection campaigns. Eric Sterling, then the assistant counsel for the House Judiciary Committee, later recalled that lawmakers drafted the legislation without holding a single hearing, adding, "We did not consult with the Bureau of Prisons, or with the federal judiciary, or with D.E.A., or with the Justice Department."

That October, Congress passed the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986. It established mandatory minimum prison sentences for a range of narcotics crimes, including a "death resulting" offense involving the sharing or the sale of drugs. Sterling, now the director of the Criminal Justice Policy Foundation, which focusses on failed drug policy, has noted that Congress assumed the legislation would lead law-enforcement officials to target "high-level traffickers." But America's prisons soon filled with low-level offenders; illicit drug use and trafficking continued unabated.

Policymakers and scholars eventually agreed that neither harsh penalties nor the threat of them significantly deters drug use and sales. But in the meantime dozens of states enacted their own versions of the federal law, including the overdose-homicide provision. At first, the option went largely unused: the Northeastern law lab recently attempted to chronicle the history of such cases, and found hardly any from the eighties and nineties. But in the past two decades, as opioid addiction escalated and overdoses became the leading cause of death in America for people under fifty, police officers and prosecutors seized upon the overdose-homicide alternative as a new "tool." Now there are many hundreds of such cases a year.

Like the federal law, the state statutes ostensibly targeted "high-level traffickers" and "repeat offenders." Some career criminals have been caught in this way. Last year, a New Jersey woman fatally overdosed on fentanyl-tainted heroin; police charged the man who purportedly provided her with the drugs, and also Curtis Geathers, the man's alleged source. Geathers had multiple priors: in the early two-thousands, he was prosecuted for attempted murder and went to prison for aggravated assault; in 2016, he pleaded guilty to trafficking after police found nearly six hundred packets of heroin, plus cash and crack, in his hotel room.

But, as Northeastern has reported, overdose-homicide prosecutions tend to sweep up minor offenders who are "struggling with addiction and who purchase drugs on behalf of themselves and their peers." Leo Beletsky, the director of the Northeastern law lab, studied two hundred and sixty-three prosecutions that occurred between 2000 and 2016, and found that about half of the defendants were "friends, family, or romantic partners" of the person who died. In Wisconsin, Daniel Adams, a defense attorney, surveyed a year's worth of his state's cases, from 2015, and found that only nineteen of eighty-one defendants were "commercial drug dealers." In a sentencing memo, Adams defined commercial drug deals as "deliveries that were performed solely for financial benefit—not by another addict/middleman/connection for joint use or to otherwise support their own addiction."

Lee Hoffer, a medical anthropologist at Case Western Reserve who studies local heroin markets as "complex adaptive systems," identifies this subset of users as "brokers." He has written that "a buyer trusts the broker to make a purchase and return with drugs; a broker trusts that if they do so the buyer will reward them. In this way, brokering is a 'favor' and an economic service." One prosecutor told me, "Yeah, we call that a drug dealer." But

BOY

He found himself kneeling in mud
And asked the river for forgiveness.
The river punished him with silence.

His whole life it had consumed him,
The fear of doing it wrong, and now—
He walked among the trees

Like a gallery, uncertain where to start.
Afraid of looking at them wrong or in
The wrong order. His whole life

Even the streamlets, the streamlets had
Shied from him like mice. He _____
To be _____. In the clearing the dew

Evaporates. The grass looks dull, dutiful.
One by one, the components of feeling
Slide around his body without touching his

Body. His body is a snow globe. His thoughts
Snow. In him on him falls the snow. He is
Buried, utterly, like the sea is buried by rain.

—*Annelyse Gelman*

Hoffer argues that dealers "invest in a quantity of drug to resell," or they "juggle"—buy illicit substances and repackage them into smaller quantities for resale.

Crucially, brokers do not profit from their role. Jamie's finances worsened the entire time she used heroin. Having borrowed against both her paycheck and her car title, she owed creditors thousands of dollars in high-interest loans. She scored some free drugs, helped some people who were also struggling with addiction, and made it through another day without withdrawal.

No one has formally documented how many Americans are going to prison in overdose-homicide cases, but the nonprofit Drug Policy Alliance found that, between 2011 and 2016, media references to such prosecutions rose by more than three hundred per cent. Northeastern's study showed that Pennsylvania appears to lead the country; Ohio runs second, with at least three hundred and eighty-five cases in the past two decades. In December, five legal scholars, including Beletsky, asked the Ohio Criminal Sentencing Commission to reassess the state's use of overdose-homicide prosecutions. In one exchange with the commission, the scholars urged accountability that is "proportionate to culpability."

The sentences can be outlandish. In 2015 in Louisiana, Jarret McCasland, whose girlfriend fatally overdosed, was found guilty of second-degree murder and automatically sentenced to life in prison without parole. Nearly two thousand people have signed a petition arguing that McCasland is being punished "for being addicted to opiates," and that the verdict is a "slap in the face to all who seek help from this painful disease." The judge said that it bothered him "tremendously" that he had to impose a life sentence. McCasland's appeals attorney later said, "The court was right to be troubled by a law that equates poor judgment with murder."

In Florida, in 2017, Jamie Nelson, a drug user, gave another user, Tracy Skornicka, a ride to find Nelson's dealer, in exchange for several dollars' worth of heroin. After Skornicka overdosed and died, Nelson was charged with first-degree murder. The state could have put her to death. When Nelson's lawyer, Jeffrey Leukel, succeeded in getting the murder charge dismissed, prosecutors in Seminole County had Nelson indicted for manslaughter. Leukel told me that, for the prosecutors, "it's more important to them to save face than to do the right thing." Nelson, who was also charged with distribution, now faces a possible thirty years in prison.

Prosecutors and law-enforcement officials are holding conferences and online seminars to explain how their colleagues could pursue overdose-homicide cases. Defense attorneys, meanwhile, are scrambling to learn how to respond to such prosecutions. Northeastern recently published the second edition of a defense "tool kit," an eighty-six-page manual inspired both by prosecutors' increasingly enthusiastic embrace of the approach and by anecdotal reports of ineffective defense counsel. The tool kit advises defense lawyers to scrutinize autopsy reports, death certificates, and toxicology results: many opioid-overdose deaths involve multiple drugs, raising "significant" questions about cause of death. In Pennsylvania, the tool kit notes, some deaths have been reported as overdoses "with no toxicology reports." One county coroner, after the death of a friend's son, began classifying all fatal heroin overdoses in his jurisdiction as homicides.

Politicians have often been opportunistic in their championing of overdose-homicide law. In his sentencing memo, Adams, the defense attorney in Wisconsin, wrote that many state prosecutors criminalize addiction as a way to "show action" in the face of the opioid scourge. In 2017 alone, legislators in at least thirteen states proposed new laws. That year, a Florida sheriff warned, in a video that went viral on social media, "If our agents can show the nexus between you, the pusher of poison, and the person that overdoses and dies, we will charge you with murder." The sheriff was flanked by four officers wearing body armor and balaclavas. President Donald Trump, who has called for drug dealers to be put to death, has not directly addressed overdose-homicide cases, but in 2018 Attorney General Jeff Sessions declared that prosecutors "must consider every lawful tool

Phil and Susan Penix, whose daughter Courtney took drugs supplied by Maynard, supported Maynard's prosecution.

at their disposal"—including the death penalty.

That year, the National District Attorneys Association, in its first white paper on the opioid crisis, urged law-enforcement agencies and prosecutors to "treat every overdose death as a homicide and assign homicide detectives to respond to these scenes." The paper's authors argued that "the potential of being charged with homicide" provided an "added incentive for a dealer to cooperate with law enforcement and provide other actionable intelligence for broader distribution networks." State prosecutors can exert leverage by threatening defendants with the prospect of federal charges—the mandatory minimum federal sentence for overdose homicide is twenty years. Jared Shapiro, another attorney for Jamie Nelson, in Florida, told me that investigators have the mistaken "impression that they can charge low-level offenders and get them to flip, creating a crumbling pyramid in which El Chapo types will fall."

Hoffer, the Case Western anthropologist, said that, as the opioid crisis drags on, the overdose-homicide approach has become "low-hanging fruit." Collins, the Columbus defense attorney, told me that such prosecutions promote a grotesque misreading of the complexity of addiction; it is obscene, he said, to equate overdose deaths with "hard-core murder cases."

Franklin County, the most populous in Ohio, sits at the center of a state geographically primed for multidirectional trade. Interstates 70 and 71 connect to Denver, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Columbus, one of the fastest-growing metropolises in the Midwest, has been called Test City, U.S.A., because so many retail and fast-food companies try out new products there. It's been said that if you "raked America together you'd find Columbus."

In the late nineties, a Mexican drug faction, the Xalisco Boys, identified Franklin County as a promising market for black-tar heroin, which resembles chips of coal. Sam Quinones, the author of the 2015 book "Dreamland," describes the Xalisco Boys as "our quietest traffickers" and "our most aggressive." Couriers move in and out of the Columbus area, renting apartments with cash. Testifying at a 2017 congressional hearing, Mike DeWine, who was Ohio's attorney general at the time and is now the governor, compared buying heroin to ordering a pizza: "You get it in half an hour, and you are going to get it cheap." After Ohio shut down the pill mills that proliferated with the advent of Oxycontin and other opioids, users found a ready substitute in heroin.

Illicit drugs are often cut with other substances. With heroin, adulterants include the potent painkiller fentanyl and the tranquilizer carfentanil, which is used to sedate elephants. Fentanyl surfaced in the Franklin County drug supply around 2014, and by the next spring Ohio was leading the nation in fatal opioid-related overdoses. Since 2015, more than fifteen thousand Ohioans have died from taking such drugs.

In March, 2015, Franklin County's new coroner, Dr. Anahi Ortiz, created a fatality-review board, to scrutinize each unintentional-overdose death in her jurisdiction and identify gaps in the system. She told me, "I brought law enforcement into the room. I brought public health into the room. I brought treatment centers into the room. I brought the public defender into the room." The reforms led to important improvements, including the increased use of Narcan, an injection or nasal spray that can immediately reverse a heroin overdose.

Yet Franklin County's problem kept growing. By April 27, 2015, the day that Jamie and Courtney met in the Walmart parking lot, Ortiz's office had already handled a hundred and twelve opioid overdoses that year. Users were overdosing at home and in public; two people had drowned (one in a bathtub, the other in a garden pond). A man had overdosed behind the wheel of his Honda Civic while parked outside a Pier 1.

One of Ortiz's close advisers on the review board was Rick Minerd, the chief deputy of the Special Investigations Unit at the sheriff's office. Minerd, who considers himself "the least coppy cop you'll ever meet," has an M.B.A., and prefers innovative problem-solving to car chases. Ortiz's review board inspired him to find his own creative angle on the overdose epidemic.

Traditionally, cops have viewed drug users as criminals, and arrested them; the opioid crisis convinced them that drug addiction could happen to anyone, including their own family and friends. Minerd was among those who realized that law enforcement needed to play an aggressive role in outreach and treatment.

Congress had directed the Department of Justice and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy to convene a National Heroin Task Force, which ultimately urged "robust criminal enforcement" along with increased access to treatment and recovery services. Opioid task forces multiplied as federal funding became available—the U.S. government is spending billions of dollars on the epidemic. In 2017 and 2018 combined, federal opioid-related programs allocated more than three hundred million dollars to Ohio alone; the Justice Department's contributions made a particularly dramatic jump, from six million dollars in 2017 to twenty million in 2018.

In Franklin County, Minerd created a task force called HOPE, for Heroin Overdose Prevention and Education. He assigned two of his top narcotics detectives to work with treatment specialists and provide overdose survivors with access to help. These efforts immediately began saving lives. HOPE detectives are on twenty-four-hour call to drive users to treatment, and they routinely follow up with survivors, urging them to take advantage of free health-care options. As the Northeastern law lab notes, "Numerous cost-benefit analyses have found that treatment outperforms punitive measures; it reduces demand."

Another directive of the task force was to treat unintentional fatal overdoses as homicides, with the goal of arresting dealers "capitalizing on people's addiction." When Courtney Penix died, the task force was looking for a "test case."

Around the time Courtney graduated from high school, an ex-boyfriend texted her parents, Phil and Susan, to say that she had a drug problem. The Penixes had suspected as much. Pain pills and cash often disappeared from their home, along with items that could be hawked, like the family's PlayStation. The cutlery drawer held a diminishing number of spoons. By the time the Penixes realized the seriousness of Courtney's addiction, she was eighteen and beyond their legal control. She left rehab early twice. The problem grew so severe that Phil told her, "Your mother and I have already prepared ourselves for your death."

After Courtney met Jamie in the Walmart parking lot, she drove across the road, to a Meijer gas station, and entered the rest room. She remained there for more than an hour, with the door locked. A corporate-security manager eventually forced the door open and found Courtney lying unconscious, alongside a used syringe.

A police officer tried to revive her until paramedics arrived; his partner searched Courtney's belongings and found a black-rock substance, another syringe, a shoelace, two singed spoons, a lighter, the migraine medication Sumatriptan, and dozens of Suboxone wrappers. Paramedics administered three doses of Narcan, but, at 7:49 P.M., at a Columbus hospital, Courtney was pronounced dead.

Homicide detectives from the Columbus Division of Police classified the case as "not a crime." Later, when Ortiz finalized Courtney's autopsy, she categorized her death as an accidental overdose.

The night Courtney died, her parents went through her phone, and found multiple text threads mentioning drugs. Phil told me that he called one of the numbers and "went on a rant" to the man who answered, saying, "If I ever find out who you are, I will make things happen."

Three of Courtney's uncles, on her mother's side, the Plancks, were police officers. One of them, Brent Planck, a longtime narcotics officer in Columbus, decided to independently investigate Courtney's death. He told me, "I wanted to find out who was responsible, other than my niece—obviously she's responsible. But who's *selling* this shit?"

Courtney's texts provided the name Jamie and an exchange about Walmart. Planck acquired security-camera footage from both Walmart and Meijer. The Meijer footage showed Courtney arriving at the gas station at around 5:40 P.M., twenty minutes after seeing Jamie, in dark leggings and a white-and-gray windbreaker, her sunglasses on top of her head. The Walmart footage showed a woman getting out of a Chevy Cobalt and meeting Courtney at her car.

Columbus detectives still did not see a case. But Planck heard that the sheriff's office was starting an overdose-homicide task force, and handed off his information.

When a loved one overdoses, it may be easier for family and friends to think of her as prey than to accept the more complex reality of addiction. And for detectives—who, in conventional homicide cases, often work tirelessly to provide "closure" to grieving families—it can be motivating to reimagine a tragic accident as a crime scene, with a victim and a perpetrator. Dennis Cauchon, the president of Harm Reduction Ohio, a nonprofit that opposes overdose-homicide laws, recalls hearing a prosecutor say at a conference, "When parents ask us to do something, it's hard to say no."

When Ron O'Brien, the chief prosecutor in Franklin County, first heard about the HOPE task force, he needed to be convinced of the merits of pursuing overdoses as homicides. He viewed such cases as problematic, in part because jurors may be reluctant to hold anyone except the drug user accountable. In a recent Wisconsin case, some prospective jurors declared that they were "uncomfortable" with the idea of prosecuting, given that "the person who died made the decision to take heroin." In North Carolina, in 2016, Louise Vincent, the mother of a teen-ager who fatally overdosed, initially wanted to "punish" the person who had provided her daughter with drugs. Vincent, who also had an addiction, later decided that overdose-homicide prosecutions were allowing politicians to skirt responsibility for their own failure to curb the opioid crisis. In 2018, Vincent, who directs a nonprofit called the Urban Survivors Union, launched #Reframetheblame, a campaign that urges users to sign a "Do not prosecute" document. The "directive" reads, in part, "If I die of an untimely accidental overdose I ask that you do not use my accidental overdose as a tool of your drug war to blame and charge others with murder or homicide."

Although O'Brien is a Republican in a city that he describes as "lock-stock-and-barrel Democrat," he is respected by members of both parties. A lanky, soft-spoken Ohio native, he was elected chief prosecutor in 1996; before that, he served as the city attorney of Columbus. When the sheriff's office pitched him the idea for the HOPE task force, he was facing reëlection. Despite his misgivings, he endorsed overdose-homicide prosecutions, having been persuaded that the detectives' investigation of Jamie Maynard had yielded an "air-tight" case.

Jamie was indicted in August, 2015. In addition to involuntary manslaughter, she was charged with trafficking, as well as with a lesser-known felony called "corrupting another with drugs," which, in Ohio, carries a mandatory minimum sentence of two years in prison. Altogether, Jamie faced up to twenty and a half years. Her parents decided that they couldn't afford Mark Collins, and instead hired the only lawyer who showed up at the arraignment, Clay Lopez, a former Franklin County prosecutor who was now in private practice.

Jamie pleaded not guilty. The case became a top story in the local news media. Zach Scott, Franklin County's sheriff at the time, appeared on TV, declaring that "drug dealers" were now being held to a tough new standard of accountability. Courtney's parents praised the overdose-homicide initiative; her father said that defendants like Jamie deserved to be charged with murder. Network affiliates aired footage of Jamie at her arraignment, wearing jail khakis and looking unwell. The Ohio media hailed the prosecution, in almost victorious tones: the Fox station in Columbus declared, "Investigators say it can actually be pretty challenging to connect the addict who dies to the dealer who gave them the drugs, but tonight for the first time detectives say they've done it—and this is only the beginning."

Jamie accepted that she had participated in the drug trade but not that she had "corrupted," much less killed, Courtney. At the time, an overdose-homicide prosecution was largely untested at trial, and in the end Jamie decided not to risk more than two decades in prison. She pleaded guilty to trafficking and to involuntary manslaughter.

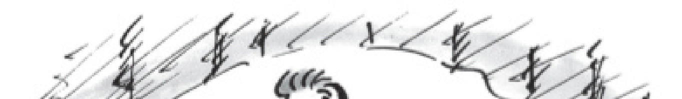
After her arrest, she had briefly been sober, then relapsed; in the spring of 2016, she got clean again, after learning that she was pregnant. She was dating Jeremy Faust, a plumber and an old high-school friend who was also in recovery.

Twelve days after their daughter, Joey, was born, Jamie appeared for her sentencing, in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas. A family friend spoke for the Penixes, declaring that society should be on "a mission" to "hold street-level dealers accountable and responsible" in fatal overdoses; people like Jamie were "predators" who targeted the "helpless minds of good people."

Jamie stood and asked Courtney's family for forgiveness. She was deeply sorry for her role in Courtney's death, and ashamed that she hadn't been "strong enough to say no" to heroin the first time she was offered it. She assured the Penixes that Courtney had hated addiction and hadn't wanted "to live like that." Jamie told them, "We had many conversations about both of us wanting to quit, and get our lives back. The reality is, it's not easy."

The judge, Chris Brown, called the case "an undeniably tragic situation," noting that if Jamie hadn't given Courtney heroin someone else probably would have. Nevertheless, he faulted Jamie for having "provided her the means," and sentenced her to a term of four years and eleven months.

Jamie was sent to a women's prison,



"I wrote this next song using your personal information, so I know you'll like it."

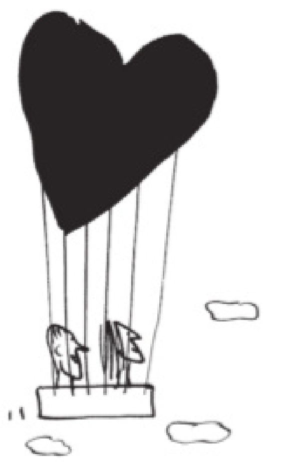
in Marysville. Judge Brown had warned her not to apply for early release before she had served at least half of her sentence; she applied, anyway, and he denied her. Last February, Jamie reapplied. During two years in prison, she had become sober, and had committed no infractions. She had earned a community-college degree, making the dean's list each semester. And she had completed more than a dozen courses on such topics as trauma, grief, relationships, parenting, and victim awareness. In a letter to the court, she wrote, "I am just asking you for a chance."

The state opposed early release, as did Courtney's family. At a hearing, her father said, "We've got to set an example." Judge Brown disagreed. He noted that Jamie had largely led "a law-abiding life," and had committed an offense "under circumstances not likely to recur." She had "shown genuine remorse" and made "strides toward rehabilitation." Her "risk of recidivism" was "so low" that he wanted to keep her out of transitional housing, where some offenders live when returning to society. "Placing her with that population of people would actually be detrimental," he said. On April 25, 2019, Jamie went home.

The rate of Franklin County's unintentional-overdose deaths has climbed since Jamie was indicted: in 2016, there were two hundred and sixty-six opioid-related fatalities. Last year, there were four hundred and twenty-one in just the first nine months. This spring, Franklin County will open a thirty-seven-million-dollar coroner's facility and, next year, a third jail.

Since 2015, Franklin County prosecutors have pursued twenty-nine overdose-homicide cases against twenty-seven people. Fourteen of the defendants had a criminal record there, including felony drug trafficking, weapons violations, and robbery involving a firearm. Thirteen defendants, Jamie among them, had no record. Yet the Ohio statute conflates a case like hers with that of a defendant like Rayshon Alexander, who, in 2016, continued to sell carfentanil-tainted heroin even after learning that his customers were "falling out": two of them died, and at least eleven others suffered near-fatal overdoses. Alexander was charged with murder. He pleaded guilty to involuntary manslaughter—as Jamie had—and to other felonies, and was sentenced to fifteen years.

Facing a potentially long prison term, overdose-homicide defendants usually plead guilty. Only two Franklin County cases have gone to trial. One ended in a mistrial. The other involved a defendant, Andrew Nichols, who used cocaine with a young woman he had met in rehab; after she fatally overdosed, he wrapped her body in trash bags and duct tape, and hid it in his basement. His landlord discovered the corpse six weeks later. Nichols was sentenced to six years in prison.



Overdose-homicide task forces are still being created across the country, consuming enormous resources. According to a Drug Policy Alliance report, this approach is not "successful at either reducing overdose deaths or curtailing the use or sale of illegal drugs." Beletsky, of the Northeastern law lab, has written that the "surging reliance on drug-induced homicide charges" diverts resources from public-health agencies that "already operate in an environment of extreme scarcity." He pointed out that Narcan is increasingly expensive, and isn't sufficiently accessible.

Lindsay LaSalle, who wrote the Alliance report, told me, "We have vested too much discretion in individual prosecutors." The discretion extends to the very definition of drug dealing. In one Franklin County case, in 2016, prosecutors considered it a "mitigating circumstance" that Lindsay Newkirk, who was charged with involuntary manslaughter after injecting another user with heroin, was the victim's own daughter. She served two years in prison. Because the relationship was familial, the prosecutors were able to see Newkirk's actions as something other than drug dealing. O'Brien, the chief prosecutor, told me, "You can sympathize with that offender, because she was herself an addict, her dad was an addict, and she was just trying to help him."

O'Brien and I were talking in his office, in downtown Columbus. We were joined by Carol Harmon and Jamie Sacksteder, assistant prosecutors who have handled overdose-homicide cases since O'Brien agreed to formally consider them. I asked how O'Brien's description of the Newkirks' dynamic was different from the one between Jamie and Courtney. Jamie, O'Brien said, "was doing it on a regular basis." He then acknowledged that perhaps Lindsay Newkirk "was, on a regular basis, getting drugs and using them, and giving them to Dad, too—I don't know."

Sacksteder offered that the dad "couldn't find a vein on his own," and that his daughter was "basically helping him, so he wouldn't get dope-sick." I again noted the similarities to Jamie Maynard's case. Harmon interjected, "The daughter's not a dealer."

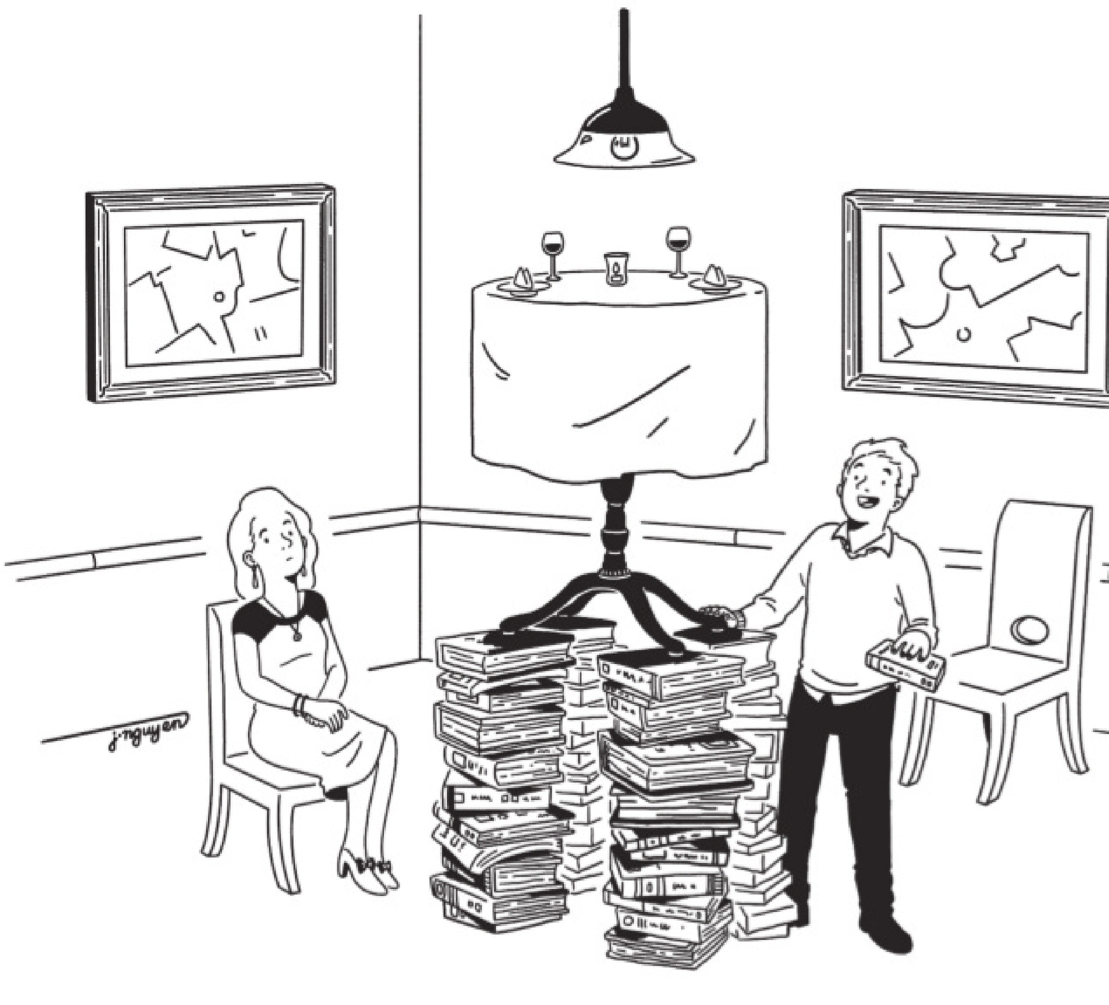
At the hearing on Jamie's early release, Harmon had told the court that she had "re-looked" at the texts between Jamie and Courtney, and still viewed them as proof that Jamie was a dealer. "People would reach out to her" for "a hookup," Harmon told the judge, adding, "I'm not standing here telling the court that she was some big-kilo amount of drug dealer and mover, but Ms. Penix died on April 27, 2015, and those are the drugs that Ms. Maynard gave her."

In O'Brien's office, Harmon repeated this argument, saying, "We had evidence that Maynard—again, I'm not sitting here saying that—"

"She's not the French Connection!" O'Brien said.

The Northeastern scholars call prosecutors and law-enforcement officials "the most powerful influence" behind the "ethically dubious leap" between overdose and homicide. They argue that such a perversion of legislative intent threatens to "flood the system": the U.S. homicide rate could spike considerably if more police agencies embrace the strategy.

Nate Smith, the sergeant who originally led the HOPE task force, told me it bothered him that, in the past, "so many people's son or daughter would die of an overdose, and seldom was a police report even taken." He and Minerd, both highly decorated law-enforcement officials, felt that they were doing good by treating unintentional overdoses



“There! No more wobble.”

• •

as homicides. Minerd said, “To watch parents who have parented the right way, and who raised their kid in a community they thought was safe and that kid *still* overdosed? They’re not moral failures. They didn’t parent wrong. That’s always been the motivating factor for me, listening to the stories of the families. The hurt in their eyes—that’s what motivates me.”

The task force has expanded its scope, and now collaborates with some twenty law-enforcement agencies in Franklin County. Smith recently left HOPE, in order to teach at the training academy for the Franklin County Sheriff’s Office. A new sergeant, Brian Toth, transferred in, from organized crime. The task force, which works within the sheriff’s undercover narcotics unit, now has four dedicated detectives. On multiple occasions, I joined them, and the wider narcotics team, as they worked various cases. One day, SWAT operators raided a house and found drugs, cash, and a gun. In another case, detectives met a compromised cartel courier in a trap house; they confiscated heroin that had been sewn into a pink velveteen pillow stitched with “There’s no place like HOME.” In a sting operation, detectives used hidden cameras, and the help of a real-estate agent, to arrest a woman who was accused of posing as a prospective home buyer in order to steal painkillers from people’s medicine cabinets. In an October case, a man was discovered dead, on his aunt’s sofa, surrounded by “Gone with the Wind” memorabilia and still holding the TV remote. Drug paraphernalia was present, but his cell phone offered no immediate leads on where he’d obtained the drugs; detectives inventoried it, anyway, in the hope that further scrutiny would yield clues. In another incident, where three people died in the same house, detectives used a cell phone found at the scene to text the person they believed had delivered the fatal batch, and pretended to order more drugs; they then arrested the guy who showed up with dope.

One morning in August, Toth responded to a call from an old brown brick apartment building north of Columbus. It resembled a two-story motel, with exterior staircases and iron railings. The referring detective told Toth that a woman and her boyfriend had fallen asleep together the previous night: “She wakes up this morning, about 8 A.M.—he’s fuckin’ *dead*.” The girlfriend was sitting outside with a neighbor, wearing a pink tie-dyed shirt, black leggings, and Nike slides. Toth, noticing that the woman had uncontrollable jitters, said, “Look at that leg.”

Upstairs, in Apartment H, the dead man lay face up at the foot of a mattress on the living-room floor. He was bare-chested, and wearing dungarees and dark socks. Foamy vomit had run from the left side of his mouth and down his face. The inside of his left forearm held needle marks.

The detectives looked around. The apartment was largely empty, but on a dresser they found a charred spoon, scales, baggies, and a razor blade. A heavy stick leaned beside the front door; in one corner was an aluminum bat. There was a deck of cards, a bunch of dice, and a scorecard pencilled with players’ names: Daddy, Baby. Baby was up by one.

Next to the body lay a pack of Marlboros and a purple lighter. A tiny photograph of a woman was taped to the pack. That’s how personal property is labelled in rehab, one of the detectives pointed out.

The woman in the photograph wasn’t the girlfriend—it was a neighbor, who was in jail. Toth put the girlfriend in the front seat of his unmarked police vehicle and asked for an explanation. Detective Chuck Clark, whose case it was, sat in the back, listening closely. The girlfriend told the investigators that whatever had killed her boyfriend must have come from elsewhere. She said, “I know he found something in that cigarette pack—I know it! I can feel it in my fucking soul!”

The detectives hadn’t found anything in the pack except cigarettes. Toth said, “You saw something in that cigarette pack.”

“I did not!”

The girlfriend claimed that she’d spent the night with her head on her boyfriend’s chest, which also seemed dubious: in many overdoses, loud “agonal” breathing precedes death. Another detective, listening at the car’s open window, finally murmured, “Code B,” which meant to arrest her.

Toth gave the woman one last chance. He said, “Your boyfriend is no longer here, and all we want to do is—”

"Figure out what happened," she said.

Toth told her, "I think you know something."

The woman, as if suddenly comprehending her precarious position, said, "Come with me."

They all filed back into the apartment. In the bedroom, she reached into the closet and, sobbing, retrieved a baggie of beige powder from the overhead tracks of the sliding door.

She had made things better for herself by giving up the drugs, but worse by lying. The detective who wanted to arrest her told his colleagues, "I just don't have the patience for that shit. She *knew* what fucking killed him." (The man died of a combination of cocaine, fentanyl, and acetylfentanyl, a synthetic opioid that can be up to a hundred times more powerful than morphine; on the street, it's known as Apache, Jackpot, and China White.)

At the very least, the detectives could charge the girlfriend with obstruction of justice and tampering with evidence. It was also within their purview to book her on involuntary manslaughter, and let the courts figure it out.

It fell to Clark whether or not to arrest the woman. Toth assured him that he'd back him whatever he decided. Clark thought for a moment, then said, "Personally, I don't think she ought to be Code B'd." With that, the woman escaped Jamie Maynard's fate.

Not long ago, Jamie's mom asked her, "Would you be alive right now if you had gotten off?" They were sitting in the family room of Frank and Debbie's house one afternoon. Jamie thought for a minute and said, "Probably not." She has now been sober for three years.

Whenever I visited the Bartons, Jamie's parents always sat together quietly, on their sectional sofa, listening to their daughter describe her life. At one point, Debbie said, "I don't understand the whole addiction thing, so then I get really mad." Addiction, in her opinion, was "a choice." Jamie told her mom, "It literally changes the chemicals in your brain."

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, addiction is a complex brain disease—"a medical illness," not a "moral failing." Northeastern's Action Lab notes that addiction "alters brain neurochemistry such that it compels a person to satisfy cravings *despite recognized negative consequences*." In 2015, both Jamie and Courtney would have suffered "intolerable distress" at the prospect of being unable to use heroin; they were contending with a disease that had diabolically transformed their lives into what the NIDA calls "a landscape of cues and triggers, like a video-game environment cunningly designed to pose the greatest challenge to his or her willpower at every turn."

A twisted distinction of overdose-homicide cases is that many defendants need the same mental-health and addiction treatments that are offered to survivors of an overdose. The laws purport to protect life, but they may actually increase fatalities: a witness to an overdose may be less likely to dial 911, for fear of being prosecuted. Most Good Samaritan laws, which provide immunity to people who call for help, don't apply to overdose-homicide cases. According to the Northeastern study, the statutes "create a quandary for people calling 911: you (probably) won't get in trouble if the person experiencing an accidental overdose event survives, but if death occurs, you're calling the cops on yourself."

While Jamie was in prison, her parents took care of her newborn daughter and her sons. (Timothy violated the terms of his parole, and is back in prison.) After she got out, she returned to living with them. She and Jeremy resumed their relationship. Three times a week, they attend an A.A. meeting together.

Even though Jamie is no longer incarcerated, her punishment, she discovered, has not ended. Her trafficking charge can eventually be expunged, but an F1—a first-degree felony—is for life. Barring a pardon or a special type of appeal, which she cannot afford, she will always be ineligible for certain housing and employment.

The state revoked her gaming license. Last August, desperate after months of looking for a job, she walked into a temp agency and told a supervisor the whole story. The agency found her a job as a janitor at a factory. Jamie got up at five-thirty every morning to mop floors and clean toilets. She was home by the time her kids got off the school bus. She took weekend and holiday shifts, for the overtime. In October, she received a promotion, to quality control, making $14.50 an hour. She would like a full-fledged job at the plant but has delayed applying, fearing that she'll fail the company's mandatory background check.

Jamie sometimes regrets not allowing her case to go to trial. She wonders if there shouldn't be a less severe kind of criminal charge for defendants who are not high-level traffickers. She wonders, too, what a jury would have made of Courtney's autopsy, which revealed that she died not strictly of a heroin overdose but, rather, of a toxic combination of heroin and alprazolam—Xanax. Other substances found in her bloodstream included the sedative lorazepam and the depression medication Trazodone.

In another case, in nearby Licking County, an appeals court recently overturned a conviction in a case involving a mixture of heroin and cocaine. And last year the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court struck down a conviction because prosecutors failed to prove that the defendant knew that the heroin he'd given a schoolmate would kill him. Because overdoses are often medically ambiguous, defendants might be wise to reject a plea offer and take their cases to trial. Leukel, the Florida attorney, told me, "The hammer of the criminal-justice system carries so much weight, people are accepting responsibility for things they shouldn't be accepting responsibility for."

If more prosecutors began losing such cases, they might stop making overdose-homicide charges against low-level offenders, especially people struggling with drug addiction themselves. This past December, the family of a Franklin County man who died after a friend gave him heroin asked the court not to impose a prison sentence. Such a punishment, they said, would be "the worst possible outcome." The dead man's sister told the judge, "It could easily have been the other way around." ♦

ANNALS OF COVERT ACTION

LAST MAN STANDING

The killing of Qassem Suleimani and the calculus of assassination.

BY ADAM ENTOUS AND EVAN OSNOS

When nation-states engage in the bloody calculus of killing, the boundary between whom they can target and whom they can't is porous. On January 3rd, the United States launched a drone strike that executed Major General Qassem Suleimani, the chief of Iran's élite special-forces-and-intelligence unit, the Quds Force. He was one of Iran's most powerful leaders, with control over paramilitary operations across the Middle East, including a campaign of roadside bombings and other attacks by proxy forces that had killed at least six hundred Americans during the Iraq War.

Since the Hague Convention of 1907, killing a foreign government official outside wartime has generally been barred by the Law of Armed Conflict. When the Trump Administration first announced the killing of Suleimani, officials declared that he had posed an "imminent" threat to Americans. Then, under questioning and criticism, the Administration changed its explanation, citing Suleimani's role in an ongoing "series of attacks." Eventually, President Trump abandoned the attempt at justification, tweeting that it didn't "really matter," because of Suleimani's "horrible past." The President's dismissal of the question of legality betrayed a grim truth: a state's decision to kill hinges less on definitive matters of law than on a set of highly malleable political, moral, and visceral considerations. In the case of Suleimani, Trump's order was the culmination of a grand strategic gamble to change the Middle East, and the opening of a potentially harrowing new front in the use of assassination.

The path to Suleimani's killing began, in effect, with another lethal operation, more than a decade ago—on a winter night in February, 2008, in an upscale residential district of Damascus, Syria. The target was Imad Mughniyeh, a bearded, heavyset Lebanese engineer in his mid-forties, who could have passed for a college professor. Mughniyeh was the architect of military strategy for Hezbollah, the armed force that dominates Lebanon and is supplied with weapons and money by Iran. Mughniyeh had been blamed for some of the most spectacular terrorist strikes of the past quarter century, including the bombings that killed nearly two hundred and fifty Americans in Beirut, in 1983, and a suicide attack at the Israeli Embassy in Argentina, in 1992, in which twenty-nine people died. Robert Baer, a former C.I.A. officer, said, of Mughniyeh, "We hold him responsible for doing more damage to the C.I.A. than anybody ever has—period." Mughniyeh was also known for his success in evading surveillance. In 1985, the C.I.A. learned that Mughniyeh was passing through Paris, but when a French paramilitary team rappelled down the wall of his hotel and burst through the window, they found only a startled Spanish family enjoying an afternoon snack. "He was an artist in keeping himself below the radar," Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli Prime Minister, said recently, at his office in Tel Aviv.

In 2006, after a brief, fierce war with Hezbollah, Israel launched a mission to hunt down Mughniyeh before he could regroup for more fighting. Olmert, the Prime Minister at the time, assigned the project to Meir Dagan, the chief of Mossad, Israel's foreign-intelligence service. Dagan, a squat sixty-one-year-old war veteran whose body carried shrapnel from old wounds, disdained the crude romance that hovered around his profession. "There is no joy in taking lives," he later told a reporter. "Anyone who enjoys it is a psychopath." Dagan had a personal stake in the Mughniyeh operation. In 1982, he was serving in southern Lebanon when a suicide bomber, allegedly recruited by Mughniyeh, reduced Israel's military-intelligence post to rubble. Dagan liked to say, "One day, I will catch Mughniyeh, and when I do, God willing, I will finish him." (Dagan died in 2016.)

One of the most sensitive questions was where to carry out the killing if the opportunity arose. An assassination on ill-chosen terrain could trigger a political backlash or another war; an attack inside Lebanon might well force Hezbollah to retaliate. In 2007, Mossad caught a break. A Mossad agent hidden among Hezbollah leaders got access to Mughniyeh's cell phone, allowing the organization to track his movements. Mughniyeh, Mossad learned, shuttled between two apartments near Damascus. One belonged to his mistress; he used the other, in the upscale Kfar Sousa neighborhood, for sensitive meetings. The Kfar Sousa apartment would be an opportune site for assassination—or, as Mossad calls such operations, "negative treatment."

While Israeli operatives slipped into Damascus to prepare for the mission, Dagan enlisted the help of the C.I.A. Unlike Israel, the U.S. had an embassy in Damascus, which housed a C.I.A. station staffed by undercover officers. At Dagan's request, the C.I.A. rented an apartment with a view of Mughniyeh's meeting place, and Israeli operatives equipped it with small remote-controlled cameras, which fed live video back to the Mossad headquarters, in the Tel Aviv area. Mossad formulated the plan, which called for hiding a bomb in a parked car. Its technicians designed a so-called shaped explosive, which projects shrapnel in a conical five-metre "kill zone." According to a former Israeli official, the C.I.A. smuggled in the explosive among ordinary shipments to the Embassy. The C.I.A. in Damascus gave the explosive to Mossad, whose agents installed it in the spare-tire holder of a Mitsubishi Pajero S.U.V.

But, at the last minute, President

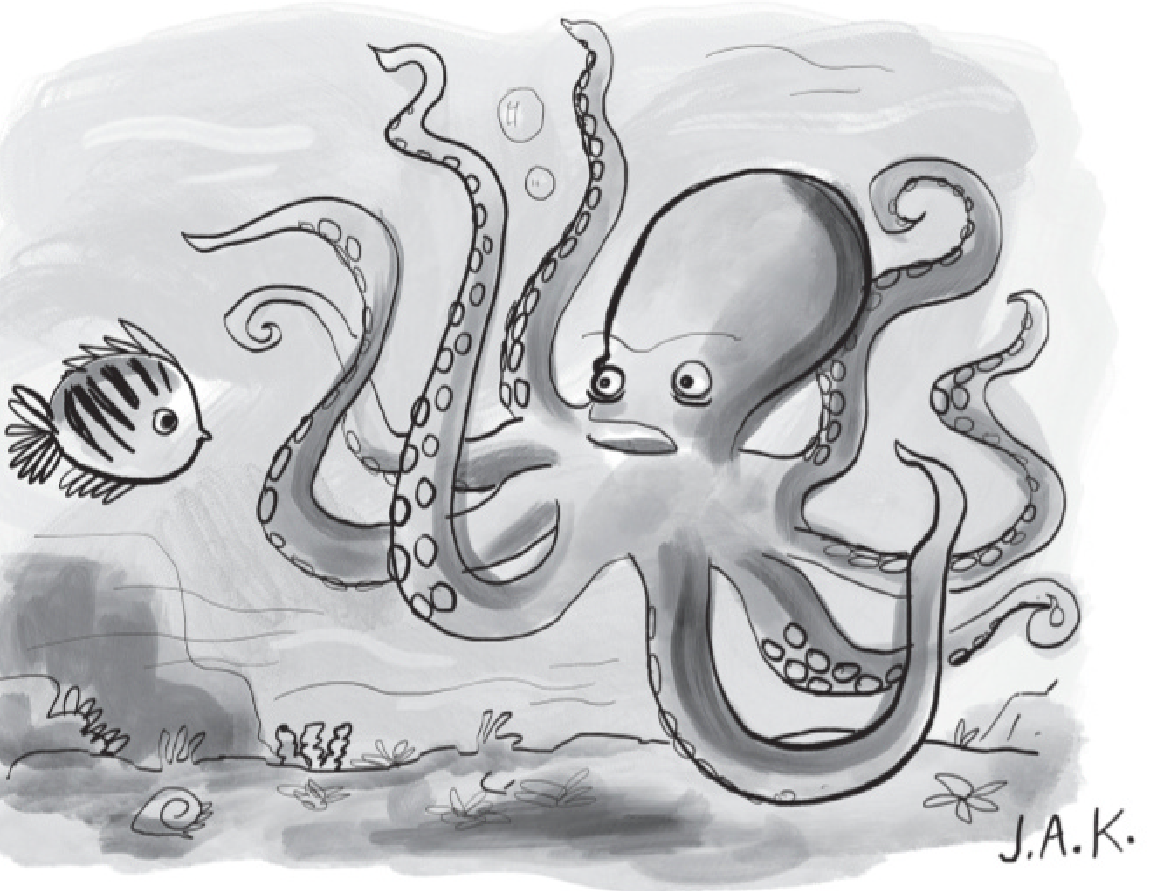
A state's decision to kill hinges on a set of highly malleable political, moral, and visceral considerations.

ILLUSTRATION BY KAROLIS STRAUTNIEKAS

George W. Bush called a halt to the operation, concerned by warnings from C.I.A. officers that the blast might kill civilians, especially students from a nearby girls' school. In 1985, the C.I.A. had been blamed for a car bomb in Beirut that had killed more than eighty people and injured two hundred, mainly civilians. The target, Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, a popular ayatollah close to Mughniyeh, had escaped unharmed. "We have never quite gotten over the '85 attempt on Fadlallah," Baer said. "It hit our reputation." Still, Olmert was intent on proceeding, and Mossad took him to a remote base in the desert and conducted a test explosion on a replica of the kill zone, using cardboard figures to represent Mughniyeh and schoolchildren passing by. The results reassured him.

Olmert visited Bush in the White House to argue for the resumption of the operation. Afterward, he refused to say what they had discussed, explaining that he was uncomfortable disclosing details even to Bush's aides in the Oval Office. "We always used to go out to the Rose Garden and whisper to each other," he said. "So the answer to your question is not even in the records." But, according to a former Israeli official involved in the operation, Bush and Olmert agreed that "only Mughniyeh would be the victim." The C.I.A. sent its station chief in Israel to the Mossad headquarters to monitor the killing in real time. Bush gave the operation a green light.

As a tool of statecraft, assassination has had a fluctuating reputation. In contrast to plainly political murders—from Caesar to Lincoln to Trotsky—killing a person in the name of national defense rests on a moral and strategic case. To its defenders, it is a lethal yet contained means of defusing a larger conflict. Thomas More, the sixteenth-century theologian who, in 1935, was canonized by the Catholic Church as a saint, contended that killing an "enemy prince" deserved "great rewards" if it saved the lives of innocents. The Dutch philosopher Hugo Grotius, who laid down early concepts of rightful conduct in war, believed it was "permissible to kill an enemy in any place whatsoever." But, over time, political leaders came to reject the legitimacy of wantonly killing one another. In 1789, Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to James Madison, described "assassination, poison, perjury" as uncivilized abuses, "held in just horror in the 18th century."



"Awkward—I was waving to eight fish behind you."

In the twentieth century, however, nation-states embraced lethal operations. During the Second World War, British spies trained Czechoslovakian agents to kill the Nazi general Reinhard Heydrich, and many governments—Soviet, British, and American among them—plotted, in vain, to kill Adolf Hitler. The Holocaust persuaded some future leaders of Israel that hunting down individuals was an unavoidable tool of defense for a small nation threatened by people who rejected its right to exist. But, as Tom Segev, the author of "A State at Any Cost," a new biography of David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, said recently, "Ben-Gurion was against personal terrorism, against the assassination of Germans—he thought it was more useful to recruit former Nazis to the Mossad. He could be sympathetic to those who wanted revenge, even if he thought revenge was not something useful." In the decades that followed, terrorism eroded the distinction between wartime and peacetime. After the Black September group, a militant wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization, massacred eleven members of the 1972 Israeli Olympic team in Munich, Prime Minister Golda Meir approved a mission to hunt down the killers. "This was something in between punishment, revenge, and deterrence," Segev said.

In 1954, during a mission to dislodge the President of Guatemala, the C.I.A. produced "A Study of Assassination," a classified how-to manual on what it called "an extreme measure," which included detailed advice. "A length of rope or wire or a belt will do if the assassin is strong and agile," it noted. "Persons who are morally squeamish should not attempt it." Between 1960 and 1965, the C.I.A. tried at least eight times to kill Fidel Castro, including a ploy involving a box of poisoned cigars. "The Game of Nations," a classic defense of power politics, by Miles Copeland, a former C.I.A. station chief in the Middle East, presented assassination as an "amoral" tool in "the art of *doing the necessary*." In 1962, Zakaria Mohieddin, the chief of intelligence under the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, said, "The common objective of players in the Game of Nations is merely to keep the Game going. The alternative to the Game is war." But every game has rules, and even at the height of the Cold War spies avoided killing one another. "If you target the opposition security service, it will target you in response," Frederick P. Hitz, the C.I.A.'s former inspector general, wrote later. "Then killing just begets killing. It is endless."

In 1975, the congressional panel known as the Church Committee began to investigate allegations of abuse by intelligence agencies; the following year, it revealed the failed schemes against Castro and others. President Gerald Ford issued an executive order declaring that no U.S. government employee "shall engage in, or conspire to engage in, political assassination." In 1981, Ronald Reagan expanded the order—and dropped the word "political" from the restriction—but the ban was never ironclad. Five years later, in retaliation for the deaths of U.S. troops in the bombing of a West Berlin disco, the Reagan Administration bombed the barracks where the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi lived. Qaddafi, who had been tipped off to the plan, escaped. The official U.S. position on assassination remained unchanged. In July, 2001, the U.S. condemned Israel for what Martin Indyk, the American Ambassador to Israel, called the "targeted assassinations" of Palestinians. "They are extrajudicial killings, and we do not support that," he said at the time.

Two months later, the terrorist attacks of September 11th inaugurated a new phase in America's relationship with lethal action, as President Bush permitted the use of unmanned drones, raids by commandos, and cruise-missile strikes far outside recognized war zones. As John Yoo, a former Bush Administration lawyer, later wrote, any resistance to "precise attacks against individuals" became outmoded in an era of "undefined war with a limitless battlefield." In 2007, Olmert and Bush agreed to expand coöperation between the C.I.A. and Mossad, despite hesitation on the part of both countries' spies. "Bush said to me, 'You know how it is with these guys, they have it in their D.N.A., they don't like to share everything,'" Olmert recalled. "And I said, 'Look, the D.N.A. of our guys is the same. I will give my guys an order to open up completely, and you give your guys an order to open up completely.'" They agreed to conduct joint operations against Iran, which was seeking to develop a nuclear program.

The advent of precision weapons and the ubiquity of cell phones have facilitated a drastic increase in kill missions. According to "Rise and Kill First," a history of Israeli assassinations, by Ronen Bergman, the country conducted approximately five hundred killings between 1948 and 2000. Then the pace quickened. In September, 2000, after Hamas launched a campaign of suicide bombings against Israeli civilians, the government embarked on an operation to hunt down bombmakers, logisticians, and leaders as senior as Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, a co-founder of Hamas. Yassin was killed in 2004, in his wheelchair, by a missile from an Israeli military helicopter. In an earlier era, commando raids had required weeks of planning; now a drone strike could be mounted in a matter of hours. Between 2000 and 2018, Israel conducted at least eighteen hundred such operations, by Bergman's count.

America's lethal operations, too, have increased sharply since 2001. According to the New America Foundation, which tracks drone strikes and other U.S. actions in Pakistan, Yemen, and Somalia, the Bush Administration launched at least fifty-nine lethal operations in those countries. Barack Obama took things even further. In eight years, his Administration, which initiated five hundred and seventy-two strikes, presided over shadow wars against Al Qaeda, ISIS, and myriad militias. In 2011, Obama ordered the commando raid that killed Osama bin Laden, at a residential compound in Pakistan. He often spoke of the need for "just war," as conceived by Christian philosophers, even as he embraced the power of drone warfare. Michael Walzer, the author of "Just and Unjust Wars," viewed the rise of drone attacks as part of a new kind of war, without formal front lines or boundaries. "Targeted killing is one response to a force like the Taliban, which strikes and hides, sometimes in a neighboring country across the border," he said. "If the target is a legitimate military target and if everything is done that can be done to make sure you hit the target and don't kill innocent people, I think it's—I hate to say it—O.K." He went on, "I'm not sure it works. And, if the accumulating evidence is that it doesn't work, then it can't be justified, because the probability of success is one of the conditions of a just military act."

Obama weighed the possible additions of names to lists of targets maintained by the Pentagon and the C.I.A. "There needed to be a legal basis," John Brennan, Obama's counterterrorism adviser and then his C.I.A. director, said. The decision to add someone to one of the lists rested on such factors as the reliability of the intelligence, the imminence of an attack, and the possibility that the target might ever be captured alive. Brennan said, "In my experience, during neither the Bush Administration nor the Obama Administration was there consideration given to targeting for assassination an official of a sovereign state."

The U.S. describes such lethal operations as "targeted killings"—a term that does not have a long history in international law—to distinguish them from assassinations, which are explicitly prohibited by Reagan's executive order and the Hague Convention. (In Israel, the terms are used interchangeably.) In practice, the drone wars have rendered the two largely synonymous, by establishing a "very attenuated concept of imminence," according to Ken Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch. "The concept of imminent attack has been stretched so far that it has become meaningless," Roth said. "It's meant to be: 'I've got a gun pointing at the hostage, and the only way you can save the hostage is by shooting me.' The U.S. has turned that into 'This is a terrorist, and he may have, at some point, been plotting a terrorist attack. We wouldn't be able to stop him, so let's just kill him.'" He went on, "The metaphor of war has inured people to killings that, frankly, are quite extraordinary and should be happening only in the narrowest of circumstances. They've become almost an ordinary U.S. response."

By the end of Obama's second term, after fifteen years of drone attacks, Americans no longer paid much attention to them. In polls, a large majority of Americans say they support targeted killings; in most other countries, the majority is firmly against them. According to the New America Foundation, in the past three years Trump has launched at least two hundred and sixty-two attacks: an increase, on an annual basis, of twenty per cent.

In the operations center at the Mossad headquarters, each officer in the Mughniyeh mission had a specific role. One kept track of Mughniyeh's movements; another monitored the video feed, in order to confirm, in a split second, that the man in the kill zone was, in fact, Mughniyeh. Olmert visited the operations center to remind them that the relationship with the United States, Israel's most valued ally, was on the line. They had to follow the agreement: kill Mughniyeh and no one else.

On the evening of February 12, 2008, as Mossad officers tracked the pings from Mughniyeh's cell phone, they learned that he was heading toward the apartment in Kfar Sousa. They sent word to Damascus, where agents maneuvered the S.U.V. into position, parking in a spot that the target was guaranteed to pass on the way to his front door.

Images of the street appeared on a large television screen in the operations center. The officers watched Mughniyeh's car pull up in his usual space. The plan called for detonating the bomb the instant that he walked into the kill zone. But Mughniyeh was not alone. He was accompanied by two other men, whom the spies recognized: Brigadier General Muhammad Suleiman, the Syrian military commander who had led that country's construction of a nuclear reactor (until Israel destroyed it in air strikes), and Qassem Suleimani.

It was an unusually formidable gathering. The three leaders, from Lebanon, Syria, and Iran, were united by a shared conflict with Israel and the United States. Each had a different area of expertise: Mughniyeh was a technical specialist who had advanced the use of synchronized bombings to maximize casualties; Suleiman, the nuclear adviser, had also built Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons, including sarin gas; and Suleimani was an aspiring warrior-statesman, at ease among politicians and at work on building the Quds Force into an Iranian Foreign Legion.

"We just had to push a button and all three of them would disappear," the former Israeli official recalled. "That was an opportunity given to us on a silver platter." Olmert was on a flight home from a state visit to Berlin, and though Mossad operatives could have tried to contact him via satellite phone for permission to kill the other two men, they didn't have much time. They also knew that the C.I.A., whose station chief was in the operations center, was authorized to help kill only Mughniyeh. In an instant, the three men slipped into the building, and the operatives settled in to wait for them to reëmerge. "They prayed that they would come back separately," the former official said.

After nearly an hour, the Mossad officers watching the video feed saw Suleimani and Suleiman leave the apartment building and drive away. Ten minutes later, Mughniyeh emerged alone. The commander of the operation detonated the explosive. On the screen, the figure of Mughniyeh disintegrated mid-stride—"cut into pieces," an official who watched the feed recalled. "His body was thrown in the air—he was killed on the spot." Nobody else was harmed.

Word reached the Israeli Prime Minister's plane in the middle of the night. The cabin was crammed with journalists, so Olmert's military assistant, General Meir Klifi-Amir, padded softly to Olmert's seat and leaned in to whisper. "The world has lost one terrorist just now," he said. Olmert responded, "God bless you." When the plane landed, Olmert took the microphone of the plane's public-address system, and said, cryptically, "I want to wish all of you a great day. This is a great day."

By the next morning, Mughniyeh's death had made the headlines across the Middle East. At eight o'clock, Dagan, the Mossad chief, walked into the Prime Minister's office with the commander of the operation, carrying a disk with a video recording of the assassination. After watching it, Dagan also played a clip of Suleimani and Suleiman walking away. Olmert was deflated. Had they reached him, he told Dagan, "I would have ordered you to kill them all."

In the days after Mughniyeh's assassination, the U.S. and Israel made a point of avoiding any claim of responsibility. Silence after a killing prevents "unnecessary complications," the former Israeli official said. "You can always send a plane, bomb a place. You want to do it in a way that will reduce the option of retaliation, or the eruption of large-scale hostilities." A few days after the bombing, Mike McConnell, the director of National Intelligence, appeared on Fox News. The host, Chris Wallace, asked him whether America had been involved in the Mughniyeh killing. "No," McConnell said. "It may have been Syria. We don't know yet, and we're trying to sort that out."

In the intelligence business, funerals can provide a feast of information on the internal politics of an enemy. Analysts keep track of who sends the most extravagant flower arrangements, which up-and-comers get prime seats, and what top leaders say, and don't say, about the need for escalation. At Mughniyeh's funeral, in the suburbs of Beirut, Hassan Nasrallah, the Hezbollah chief, delivered a eulogy by video, full of the usual threats—"Zionists, if you want this kind of open war, let the whole world listen: Let this war be open"—but the details of the event were reassuring. Thousands of citizens turned out, but Syrian officials stayed away. They suspected that Israel was behind the killing, but President Bashar al-Assad didn't want to face political pressure to retaliate. In intercepted communications, Syrian leaders were overheard stoking rumors that Mughniyeh died in an internal feud. "Assad knew exactly who did it," the former Israeli official said. "But, since he didn't want to get involved in any major confrontation, he had to give an excuse." The agent who had given Mossad access to Mughniyeh's phone was smuggled out of Lebanon and resettled in another country. Olmert told Mossad officers that, in a follow-up conversation with Bush, the two men had commiserated over the missed opportunity. "What a pity," Bush said. "So sad they were not taken out at the same time."

In the Presidential palace in Damascus, Muhammad Suleiman had his office on the same floor as President Assad's. Within weeks of Mughniyeh's death, an operation to assassinate Suleiman was ready. In this case, Israeli assassins would act alone. (Unlike the U.S., Israel did not consider Syrian officials off limits for targeted killings.) The task was assigned to Shayetet 13, a special-forces unit of the Israeli Navy. The plan called for the killing of Suleiman at his holiday retreat, overlooking the beaches of Tartus, on Syria's Mediterranean coast. In the course of the summer, Israeli operatives set up hidden video cameras, which beamed live footage of the home back to a command post in Tel Aviv. Suleiman liked to spend summer evenings entertaining on a large terrace with a view of the sea.

On the evening of August 1, 2008, Israeli intelligence learned that Suleiman was on the road to Tartus. In Tel Aviv, commanders put the assassination plan into action. In the darkness, several kilometres off the coast, an Israeli submarine broke the surface of the water. Six snipers and a commander disembarked and boarded a semi-submersible boat. When they reached the shore, they scattered into preplanned positions, hiding, at a distance, on either side of the terrace. Suleiman, who had a broad forehead and a heavy gray mustache, was sitting next to his wife, amid a large group of guests. Commanders in Tel Aviv watched the scene on television monitors. The snipers, with silenced rifles, fired simultaneously. "Six bullets penetrated his heart and head, three from each side," the former Israeli official said. "His head moved forward, to one side, and then to the other side. Suddenly, there was a spray pouring out of his head, from both sides, on the table and on the floor." His wife was unharmed. Guests recoiled and cried out in terror.

The snipers and the commander retreated to the boat, headed back to the submarine, and returned to an Israeli port. Later that evening, Israeli intelligence intercepted a conversation between Suleiman's frenzied aides and President Assad about the killing. "The reaction of Assad was very interesting," the former Israeli official said. "You're talking about the closest person to him on the most sensitive matters of the country. And he gets a telephone call at midnight that tells him that he was assassinated. . . . And Assad's immediate response was 'Don't panic. Put him in a plastic bag. Go outside of Tartus and bury him in a grave without any identifying signs.'" He went on, "I was impressed with his coolness. There was no funeral, no event. Nothing. They never admitted that he was killed. He just disappeared."

Israel would occasionally remind Assad that he was never out of reach. F-16s had roared low over his summer palace in Latakia, and, the former Israeli official said, Israeli intelligence delivered electronic messages directly to him. In the days that followed Suleiman's death, Israel said nothing as, all the while, the assassinations bred a sense of helplessness among those who might be next on the list. Assad's security advisers selected a secret refuge for him, but, in intercepted communications, he was heard belittling the plan with weary resignation: "If the Israelis want, they will come to that place. Why waste the money, and why make the effort?"

In the decision to kill, notoriety can cut both ways: there is little benefit to targeting militants with limited power, yet the deaths of high-profile opponents can have deep repercussions. Born in 1957 in Kerman Province, in southeastern Iran, Qassem Suleimani was a farmer's son who spent most of his time at the gym and at the mosque. He worked at the local water department, and, in the nineteen-eighties, during the war between Iran and Iraq, he was tasked with getting water delivered to the front lines. He fulfilled his duties with courage and climbed the ranks. But, to the C.I.A. analysts who kept track of rising officers in the Revolutionary Guard Corps, Suleimani did not stand out. Around 1998, he became head of its expeditionary unit, the Quds Force. Danny Yatom, a former head of Mossad, said, "We started to collect information about him."

In Israel, the list of potential assassination targets is assembled from multiple sources. Occasionally, the former Israeli official said, a Prime Minister will take note of media coverage and ask Mossad, "What about him? Are we capable of doing something to him? Can we *reach*

out to him?" More often, the heads of the nation's security services propose names, which must then be approved by the Prime Minister. Targets are ranked in order of importance, based on the urgency of the threat, the difficulty of the killing, and the potential costs and benefits. Though Israeli intelligence has a formidable reputation, its resources are limited by American standards, and it can't "cover the world," a C.I.A. veteran said. "They cover the shark closest to the boat."

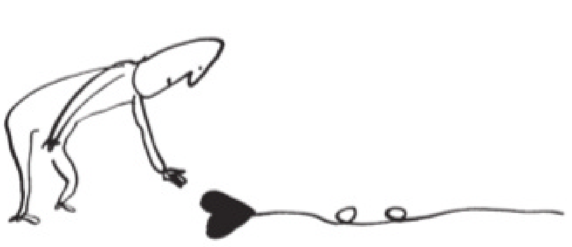
In the years after the Mughniyeh killing, Mossad worried more about Iran's nuclear program than about Suleimani's paramilitary activities. Suleimani was of special concern to U.S. forces; his militias were known for using an especially devastating explosive, which was designed to pierce the exterior of armored vehicles. During the most intense period of fighting of the Iraq War, starting in 2007, Suleimani avoided setting foot in Iraq; he appeared to think that the Americans might kill him. In fact, Stephen Hadley, Bush's national-security adviser, said, "I'm not aware of any contemplation of getting Suleimani." On occasion, Mossad officers brought up Suleimani with American counterparts, according to Stephen Slick, a former C.I.A. station chief in Tel Aviv. "They would just sort of drive it by and see if they got a rise out of anybody," he said.

In 2011, the Obama Administration considered setting up a meeting with Suleimani to deliver a blunt warning. The messenger would be Vice Admiral Robert Harward, a Navy SEAL who had grown up in Tehran and spoke Farsi. In theory, his mission would be to "impress upon Suleimani the ramifications if he continued fucking with our forces" in Iraq, a former U.S. military officer said. In one White House meeting, according to the officer, General James Mattis, then the head of Central Command, deadpanned, "If Harward is not impressed, we'll have a pistol in the toilet"—a reference to "The Godfather." It wasn't clear whether everyone in the room realized that he was joking. (Mattis declined to comment.) Around the Pentagon, the option became known as "two men enter, one man leaves."

Until 2013, Suleimani remained relatively unknown to the general public. A former Israeli security official told me that, if Israel had wanted to kill him, that would have been the time. Suleimani was trying to shore up Assad in Syria, and the civil war, which had begun in 2011, would have provided Mossad with ample cover—at least two dozen of Suleimani's colleagues in the Revolutionary Guard died in combat there. But by 2014 Suleimani had become internationally prominent. Leading Shia fighters against ISIS in Iraq, he had become a frequent presence in news stories and social media from the region. On the battlefield, Shia militia members posed with him for selfies. The Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, "considered him very much like a son," Brennan said. Israeli officials concluded that Suleimani had become too famous to dispatch without risking war with Iran. "The moment he became a celebrity, it's a different ballgame," the former Israeli security official said.

For all the coöperation between Israeli and American intelligence, they have had some of their most divisive disputes about assassinations. When Israel set out to kill the perpetrators of the 1972 Munich massacre, the list of targets included Black September's chief of operations, Ali Hassan Salameh. But Salameh was an informant for the C.I.A., which considered him a "crown jewel" in its network during the war in Lebanon, according to a former C.I.A. officer in Beirut.

Mossad pressed the C.I.A. for information about Salameh. "We didn't want to burn the source," the former C.I.A. officer said. "I remember telling headquarters, 'In my opinion, don't do it.'" The officer met regularly with Salameh. "I remember telling him, 'You know the Israelis are coming after you,'" he said. "He was very flamboyant. He had the world's shittiest tradecraft. And he had no problem rolling around town in his Chevy station wagon. I told him, 'You are a fool. People know where you're going.' He said, 'No, they'll never get me.' And I said, 'Well, you're certainly inviting them to. Do me a favor, when you come to see me, can you park four or five blocks away?'" In 1979, Mossad killed Salameh with a car bomb. C.I.A. officers were furious.



America and Israel frequently hid intelligence from each other. In the eighties, Israel offered little of what it knew about Mughniyeh, "probably because they wanted to kill him themselves," Baer said. "And the last thing they needed was this shit leaking out in the Washington *Post*." In other cases, U.S. officials withheld information because they disagreed with Israel's choice of targets. During the 2006 war in Lebanon, the U.S. considered Nasrallah, the head of Hezbollah, a political leader, and therefore off limits. But Israel saw him as a military commander. "We were concerned that Israel might target Nasrallah," John Negroponte, the director of National Intelligence at the time, recalled. Negroponte directed U.S. agencies to withhold specific details on Nasrallah's whereabouts, which Israel could use to find and kill him. "Those were the marching orders," he said.

The relationship improved the following year, when Mossad discovered that North Korea was helping to build a nuclear reactor in Syria. The Bush Administration, which was already at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, refused a request by Israel to destroy the reactor. In a phone call, Olmert told Bush that Israel would do it alone. "You don't want to know when. You don't want to know how," he said. For three months, Israeli fighter jets trained for the mission using a fake target in the middle of the Mediterranean. Only three of the sixteen crew members knew the real target; the rest were informed hours before the attack. On September 5, 2007, Israel destroyed the reactor but made no claim of responsibility. Its intelligence services had calculated that Assad would prefer to pretend as if nothing had happened rather than risk an even costlier confrontation. As predicted, he kept quiet.

In the late two-thousands, Mossad decided to launch an assassination campaign without its American partners; the targets were a number of Iranian nuclear scientists. By law, American spy agencies had to withhold information that might help Mossad kill anyone whom the U.S. was not authorized to kill. Moreover, President Obama was pursuing a very different strategy. In July, 2012, his Administration opened secret negotiations with the Iranians over its nuclear program. When Mossad learned about the talks, it stopped killing the scientists and scaled back other espionage missions that could jeopardize the American initiative and hurt relations with the C.I.A. "We had to change our attitude," the former Israeli intelligence officer said.

But Israel's conflict with Suleimani was intensifying. In 2013, Israel started bombing Iranian weapons shipments in Syria, before they could be transferred to Lebanon. In 2015, it expanded its list of targets in Syria to include bases that Suleimani was establishing for his proxy forces. The Israeli military called their approach "the campaign between wars"—an effort to beat back Suleimani's forces with air strikes and deception. Suleimani's weapons shipments and foot soldiers were relatively easy targets. When he tried to deploy forces on Syria's border with Israel near the Golan Heights, Israel responded by killing seven Iranian officers, and also Jihad Mughniyeh, the twenty-three-year-old son of Imad Mughniyeh. "The message there was 'Stop fucking around with Hezbollah on the Syrian border. We will attack you,'" an Israeli official said. Israel conducted frequent bombings, and met little resistance in Syria. The ravaged nation had become "nobody's land, where everybody did whatever they wanted," the Israeli official said. Norman Roule, an Iran specialist who recently retired from the C.I.A., said, "The campaign between wars showed that Israel could manage the Suleimani threat."

The Obama Administration, which had signed a nuclear agreement with Iran in 2015, kept its distance from Israel's campaign against the Quds Force; it made a point of withholding "actionable intelligence" that could help Israel accelerate its attacks. The message, according to a former U.S. diplomat involved, was "Be careful. Know what you're hitting." He added, "Everybody was going to blame us for whatever happened."

"Hi, Beth. Is it possible you accidentally took my umbrella and I took yours?"

By the spring of 2017, with Assad's hold on power in Syria assured and ISIS losing ground in Iraq, Suleimani began shifting more attention to fighting Israel and other U.S. allies. The Trump Administration was divided on how to deal with the threat he posed. Some of the most hawkish White House advisers sought military options to counter him and his proxy forces in Syria. But Mattis, then the Secretary of Defense, and General Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, among others, were wary of diverting resources from the campaign to eliminate ISIS, and didn't want U.S. forces to get drawn deeper into the region's conflicts.

Trump sent mixed signals. "It was a chaotic time," a former Trump Administration official recalled. "The White House called up routinely with extraordinary orders—'Get out of South Korea'; 'Let's stop NATO'; 'Bomb those guys.'" In some cases, Mattis and Dunford told their underlings not to respond to requests from White House staff for military options to pressure Iran. Some officials at the Pentagon and the State Department became concerned that hawks in the White House were manipulating the records of internal meetings—known as the "summary of conclusions"—to make it appear as if hard-line proposals on Iran had broad support.

Trump received frequent briefings on the operations of the Quds Force, but Suleimani's name came up only occasionally, a former senior Trump Administration official recalled. In February, 2018, an Iranian drone loaded with explosives penetrated Israel's airspace. White House officials wondered if Suleimani was trying to provoke a major conflict. "If Trump hadn't paid attention to Suleimani before that, that event certainly put him in the President's mind," the former senior Trump Administration official said.

In the spring of 2018, Mattis lost a crucial ally in Cabinet meetings when Rex Tillerson, the Secretary of State, was fired and was succeeded by Mike Pompeo. John Bolton became national-security

"Enough with the hard-luck stories about spanking and cursive and appointment television, Dad."

• •

adviser. The new arrivals took a harder line on Iran, and some of their counterparts in the Administration, the former senior official said, worried that "they weren't giving Trump any other options. Trump was learning on the job, and they were baiting him to do something."

Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement in May, 2018. Some dissenters within the Administration predicted that the decision would cause Iran to become more aggressive, both as a regional power and in the development of its nuclear capacities. "They're not going to say, 'O.K., cool, let's talk about this,'" the former U.S. diplomat said. "Given what we were about to do—massive economic sanctions, total strangulation—my assumption was that Iran would fight back."

In the next eighteen months, Trump and Suleimani edged closer to confrontation. In 2018, Israeli intelligence agencies told the Americans that Suleimani was trying to install long-range rockets and so-called killer drones—which explode on contact—in Iraq. Some leaders at the Pentagon and the State Department were skeptical, fearing that Israel was preparing to take steps that could further destabilize Iraq: if Israel conducted air strikes to take out suspected weapons, Suleimani's proxies could attack U.S. personnel for the first time since 2011. U.S. officials told their Israeli counterparts, "Let us check it out before you do anything." The Israelis agreed to wait.

In the White House, resistance to a more aggressive Iran policy was fading. Mattis quit in December, 2018. Trump wanted to do more to help Israel and Sunni allies confront Iran. In April, the Administration added the Revolutionary Guard Corps, including the Quds Force, to its list of foreign terrorist organizations. "Bolton and Pompeo knew that that designation opened up the targeting aperture," the former senior Trump Administration official said. But, at the Pentagon and the State Department, some officials had resisted that step, on the ground that it could set a dangerous precedent, allowing other countries to treat American forces as terrorists. The U.S. also started to provide actionable intelligence to Israel to assist its air strikes against the Quds Force. Mattis and his allies had delayed that step, too, until lawyers assessed its implications. If the U.S. fed actionable intelligence into Israel's targeting decisions—what the military calls the "kill chain"—then Americans would share responsibility for the results. Mattis had worried, as the former U.S. diplomat put it, that "the Israelis could spark something that would burn us."

For months, Trump hesitated to use force against Iran. On June 13th, when two oil tankers were attacked near the Strait of Hormuz, Pompeo blamed Iran, but Trump did not order a strike. A week later, the Revolutionary Guard Corps shot down a U.S. Global Hawk drone with a surface-to-air missile. Trump, at the urging of Pompeo and Bolton, ordered a retaliatory strike, but shortly before the launch of cruise missiles the Pentagon called a delay, to assess a security threat at the British Embassy in Tehran. After an hour, they resumed the final countdown. At this point, Trump changed his mind. The plan was abandoned. In a tweet, he wrote, "I am in no hurry." Pompeo and Bolton were displeased, the former senior Trump Administration official said.

Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's Prime Minister, was getting impatient. The Israelis were concerned that Trump's inaction would embolden Suleimani. They had also come to suspect that Trump was seeking negotiations with the Iranian President, Hassan Rouhani, much as he had with the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un. Israeli intelligence officials considered that prospect—what they called an open-ended "engagement with no results"—to be the "most dangerous" scenario.

In the summer of 2019, after a year of warning that Suleimani posed a growing threat, Israel took matters into its own hands, expanding its campaign into Iraq—precisely the scenario that some U.S. military leaders and diplomats had cautioned against. On July 19th, Israel destroyed a weapons depot north of Baghdad, where the Popular Mobilization Forces (P.M.F.), a Shia militia under Suleimani's control, was thought to be close to deploying a weapons system capable of reaching Israel. Israel claimed no responsibility for the strike. Top U.S. military leaders warned that it could incite attacks on Americans, but Trump aides assured Israel that the White House had no objections. Similar bombings followed—though it was not always clear by whom—and Shia militia leaders threatened to retaliate against U.S. forces stationed at bases in Iraq. In late August, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, a leader of the P.M.F., said, of the U.S., "We will hold them responsible for whatever happens from today onward."

By the summer's end, Israeli leaders were issuing specific warnings to Suleimani. Israel Katz, the Israeli foreign minister, told Ynet, a popular news site, "Israel is acting to strike the head of the Iranian snake and uproot its teeth. Iran is the head of the snake, and Qassem Suleimani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, is the snake's teeth." In some cases, Israel seemed to be sending messages that would be understood only by Suleimani and his close associates. In August, on a popular radio show on Tel Aviv's FM 103, Olmert was asked if Israel had ever tried to kill Suleimani. He gave a veiled answer, apparently referring to the killing of Mughniyeh, a decade earlier. "There is something that he knows, that he knows that I know," Olmert replied. "I know that he knows, and both of us know what that something is." After a moment, he added, "What that is, that's another story." The threats were meant to remind Suleimani of Israel's far reach.

Trump, though, showed signs that he was still hoping to negotiate with Iran. In September, he fired Bolton, the most prominent hawk in the White House. When Iranian drones attacked oil-processing facilities in Saudi Arabia, disrupting five per cent of the world's oil supply, U.S. intelligence blamed Iran, and Netanyahu and other U.S. allies in the region assumed that Trump would retaliate—he did not.

On September 24th, at the U.N. General Assembly, President Emmanuel Macron, of France, tried to arrange a three-way phone call with President Rouhani and Trump. Rouhani, who had belittled the value of "photo op" diplomacy, declined to participate. Netanyahu believed that if Trump entered into talks with Iran he would "lose the pressure of the sanctions," an Israeli diplomat said.

In the fall, Suleimani's militias in Iraq mounted some of their most brazen rocket attacks yet. They fired at bases in Iraq that housed U.S. forces—first on the outskirts of the bases and then closer to U.S. personnel. Israel let it be known that it was prepared to become more aggressive against the Quds Force. "The rules have changed," the Israeli Defense Minister, Naftali Bennett, said in a statement. "Our message to Iran's leaders is simple: You are no longer immune. Wherever you stretch your tentacles, we will hack them off."

By December, Iranian-backed proxies were firing larger, more powerful rockets at the bases. On December 4th, Pompeo met with Netanyahu, in Portugal, and received assurances that the U.S. would retaliate against Iran if any Americans were hurt. Pompeo privately remarked, "The Israelis want to get their big buddies into the fight for them."

In Israel, nobody in military and intelligence circles expected Suleimani to relent. A crisis appeared inevitable. "We have been delaying them, but the clock is running out," a former Mossad officer said, in Tel Aviv. "War is coming. It will happen. The question is when and on what scale."

On December 27th, after weeks of attacks, a barrage of thirty rockets hit a base in northern Iraq, injuring several soldiers and killing an American civilian contractor, Nawres Hamid, a thirty-three-year-old Iraqi-American who worked as an Arabic interpreter. "They'd intended to do far more harm," a defense official said. In response, General Kenneth McKenzie, of Central Command, sent a range of options to General Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

One of the options, which was presented to Trump, was calculated to kill a limited number of members of an Iranian-backed militia known as Kataib Hezbollah. But Trump chose a more punishing route. On December 29th, the U.S. launched air strikes on five militia sites in Iraq and Syria, killing twenty-five members of the group and wounding more than fifty. The U.S. military believed that the air strikes would arrest the cycle of violence. Instead, they touched off a surge of anti-American sentiment in Iraq. On New Year's Eve, after a funeral for the victims of the strikes, supporters of Kataib Hezbollah marched on the American Embassy compound in Baghdad, setting fire to the reception area and forcing security personnel to retreat into the compound. The Embassy was never overrun, but the images from Baghdad were reminiscent of those from the Benghazi attack. (U.S. intelligence came to believe that the organizers had intended a limited show of protest, and that it had grown out of control.) In a tweet, Trump blamed Iran, saying, "They will pay a very BIG PRICE! This is not a Warning, it is a Threat. Happy New Year!" On Fox News, Pompeo said that the Kataib Hezbollah supporters had been "directed to go to the Embassy by Qassem Suleimani."

As the Embassy siege unfolded, Trump was at Mar-a-Lago, where Milley and Mark Esper, the Secretary of Defense, presented him with slides that outlined possible responses. One slide described another round of air strikes on militia bases and other targets. The next laid out more impromptu options—a range of targeted killings that commanders did not expect to receive serious consideration. It showed three photographs—two of obscure local militia commanders and one of Suleimani. Though Suleimani had a position in the Iranian government, the U.S. defense official said, he could be legally killed because he was "dual-hatted"—he also directed proxies in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, which, as non-state actors, were legitimate terrorist targets. The U.S. had been tracking Suleimani's movements since long before there was any thought of targeting him, assembling a record that the military calls a "pattern of life."

Intelligence officials told Trump that Suleimani was planning attacks that had the potential to kill hundreds of Americans in the region, though precise details were unknown. The C.I.A. director, Gina Haspel, told Trump that Iran was unlikely to respond to Suleimani's death with large-scale retaliation, and that more Americans were at risk of being killed in attacks that Suleimani was allegedly planning than in the likely Iranian response to his death. "The risk of inaction outweighs the risk of action," she said.

Trump chose the Suleimani option. At Central Command, officers were startled; they asked to see a formal order in writing, and they scrambled to compose a plan, known as a "concept of operations." By the following evening, they had intelligence showing that Suleimani was in Beirut, seeing Nasrallah, the Hezbollah leader, and that he planned to pass through Damascus on his way to Iraq. As a site for the killing, Damascus was ruled out. It was hostile airspace, trafficked by planes from many countries. In Iraq, by contrast, the U.S. had the full range of American firepower. The defense official explained, "We had a short window if we were going to take this opportunity."

According to U.S. intelligence, Suleimani was scheduled to board a commercial plane at Damascus International Airport for the ninety-minute flight to Baghdad. Planners envisaged a missile strike on his convoy after he landed in Iraq. The plan was kept secret even from officials at the State Department in charge of securing the Embassy in Baghdad, though the Administration alerted Netanyahu.

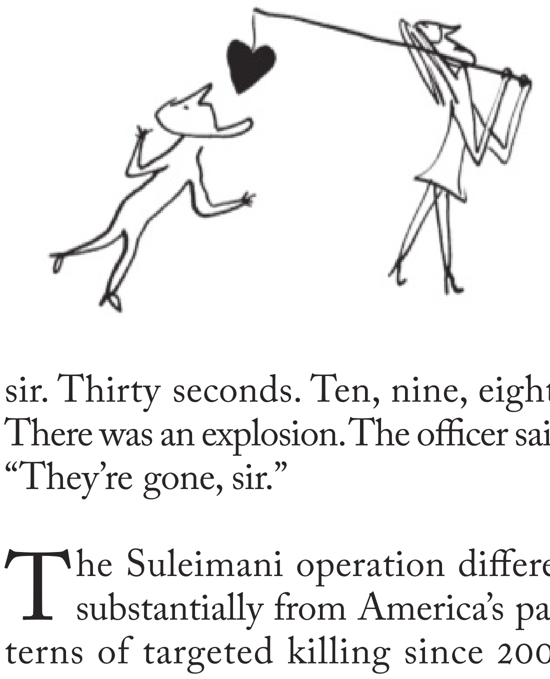
In the months before his killing, Suleimani publicly embraced the image of a wanted man. In October, Iran's state media conducted a rare, and reverential, interview with him, in which he described a moment, in 2006, when he and Nasrallah were in Beirut and saw Israeli drones circling in the sky overhead, preparing for an air strike. They escaped by hiding under a tree and fleeing, with Mughniyeh's help, through a series of underground bunkers, allowing them to, as he put it, "deceive and outwit the enemy." A few days after that interview, Iran's government announced the arrest of three suspects in a supposed plot to kill Suleimani, which had involved digging a tunnel to the site of an upcoming memorial service for his late father and then detonating a bomb during the ceremony. After years of working in secret, Suleimani had all but abandoned efforts to disguise his whereabouts. The U.S. defense official observed, "I think Suleimani was not even thinking we would take such an action."

When Suleimani boarded his final flight, American MQ-9 Reaper drones settled into position over the Iraqi capital. At 12:36 A.M., his flight touched down at Baghdad International Airport. A van and a car raced up to the base of the stairs, where Suleimani was greeted by Muhandis. Commanders knew not to proceed if the strike would risk the lives of any senior Iraqi government officials. But Muhandis was deemed an acceptable casualty.

The two men, with an entourage, climbed into the two vehicles and turned onto the empty road into town. At 12:47 A.M., as the convoy sped past rows of palm trees, the first of several missiles crashed into the vehicles, setting them aflame. In all, ten passengers were killed.

At the State Department, some security officers, who learned of the strike only when an Iraqi journalist tweeted about a mysterious explosion, exchanged hurried e-mails, asking if the Embassy was at risk. They ordered personnel in Baghdad to take cover.

Shortly before the Pentagon confirmed the news, Trump tweeted an image of the American flag. Later, in a speech to donors at Mar-a-Lago, he relived the operation, recalling that he had been told by a military officer, "They have approximately one minute to live, sir. Thirty seconds. Ten, nine, eight." There was an explosion. The officer said, "They're gone, sir."



The Suleimani operation differed substantially from America's patterns of targeted killing since 2002. Suleimani was not the leader of a stateless cabal but a high-ranking representative of one of the most populous nations in the Middle East, which, for all its deep involvement in terrorism, is not in a conventional war with the United States. In adopting a mode of assault usually reserved for a wartime enemy, the Administration acted on the belief, which is popular among many of the President's most influential advisers, that the U.S. has been deceiving itself about the nature of its relationship with Tehran. "We've been in a conflict with Iran since 1979. A lot of people just don't realize it," a Trump Administration official said.

Immediately after the killing, Iran fired more than a dozen missiles at two U.S. installations in Iraq. The Pentagon reported that, though no one was killed, more than thirty U.S. soldiers reported symptoms of traumatic brain injury. (By some accounts, the missiles narrowly avoided causing far more casualties.) Tehran also declared that it was abandoning restrictions on the enrichment of uranium, though it would continue to permit inspections from the International Atomic Energy Agency. The over-all message was that Tehran was not pursuing further escalation.

Twelve years after the gathering on a winter night in Damascus, the three participants were dead, each from a different form of lethal government action: a bombing, a sniper team, and a drone strike. In the first two cases, the countries responsible deliberately avoided claiming credit. In the killing of Suleimani, Trump departed from that approach. On January 8th, he convened a triumphant press conference, surrounded by aides and generals in uniform. Iran was "standing down," he said, and he went on to announce a new round of "punishing economic sanctions" that would remain in place "until Iran changes its behavior." Within a week, the focus in Washington drifted back to other crises, most notably the Senate impeachment trial.

But many American national-security officials braced themselves. The U.S. diplomat said that the Trump Administration's justification for killing Suleimani reminded him of the casual optimism among Bush's advisers about the consequences of invading Iraq in 2003. "We're in the first inning," he said. "When I heard about Suleimani, my first reaction was 'Good. I'm not shedding a tear.' But then my second reaction was 'Wait—was this thought through at all?'" He continued, "In addition to reprisals against our people and our partners in the region, there's now risk of being forced out of Iraq, which means we'd also need to leave Syria—precisely what Trump wants. It's also what Suleimani wanted. So if, by Suleimani's death, we are forced out of Iraq, that to him is a perfect death. That would be the final irony." Mike Morell, the former deputy director of the C.I.A., said, "We haven't dealt with the strategic problem that exists. If anything, this will strengthen the opposition to the United States. This guarantees that there's no negotiated way out of this mess with them." Brennan, the former C.I.A. director, said that he believed the killing of Suleimani was illegal: "Just because a single lawyer, or even a group of lawyers, says that something is lawful, that does not make it lawful. It just means you got someone to say that."

In closed-door briefings to Congress, Esper and Milley were asked by lawmakers if the Administration would use the Suleimani operation as a precedent for attacking other top Iranian leaders, such as the Ayatollah. They roundly dismissed the idea. But Iran and its proxies across the Middle East could regard the killing of Suleimani as precedent for their own conduct. Brennan said that the result of Trump's decision was that, in effect, "anybody would be fair game." He added, "I still believe that the Iranians feel as though they have not had their 'eye for an eye' moment for Suleimani. I think the attack against the base in Iraq that injured a few U.S. soldiers was cathartic from the standpoint of domestic politics, but there are people who are going to want to avenge Suleimani's death at some point, at some place, with blood."

Thomas P. Bossert, who served as Trump's homeland-security and counterterrorism adviser from 2017 to 2018, said, "The concern in the Bush and Obama Administrations was that Israel, unilaterally, would do something escalatory against Iran, and draw the U.S. into a conflict. Back then, Israel didn't know whether the U.S. would join in an attack to prevent Iranian nuclear advancement." He added, "Now the Israelis must be concerned that the U.S. might unilaterally escalate."

In private, by all accounts, Netanyahu was jubilant. "The killing of Suleimani changed everything," the Israeli diplomat said. Netanyahu's camp believed it set back the prospect of a diplomatic opening between Trump and Rouhani, and it signalled a new determination to keep pressure on Iran.

To replace Suleimani, Iran promoted his longtime deputy, Esmail Ghaani. It is difficult for foreign analysts to know how formidable an enemy Ghaani will prove to be. "Someone who was deputy for twenty years is not a star," the former Israeli security official said. "You are playing the second violin in the orchestra." At a minimum, Ghaani will need time to build up stature and credibility.

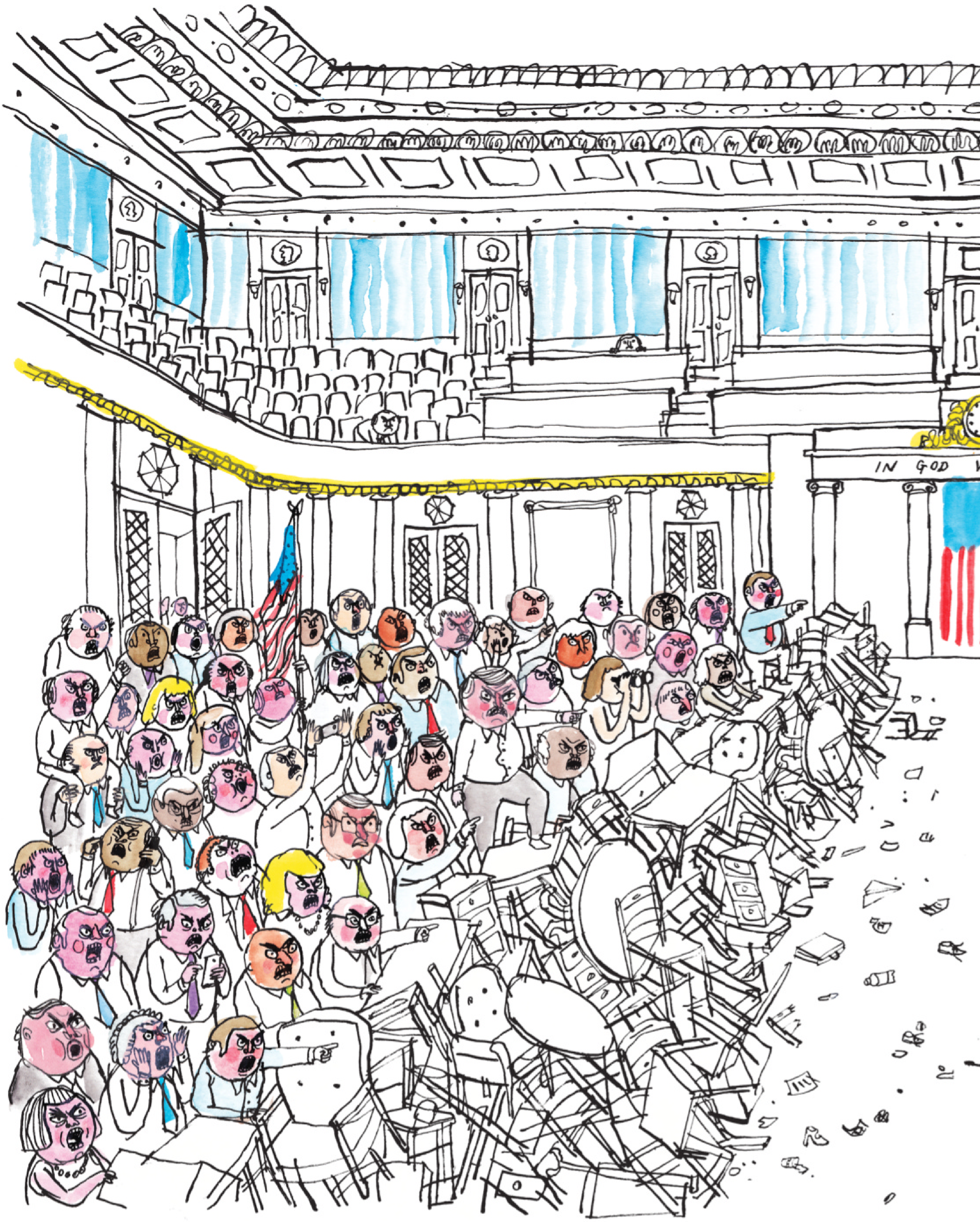
On January 6th, Iran held a funeral service for Suleimani. Millions of citizens flooded the streets of Tehran, forming a larger procession than any since the death of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1989. The Supreme Leader made a rare public appearance and wept over the casket. In multiple cities, including Baghdad, where a memorial was attended by the Iraqi Prime Minister, throngs of marchers chanted and vowed revenge. In Kerman, Suleimani's home town, a stampede killed fifty-six people.

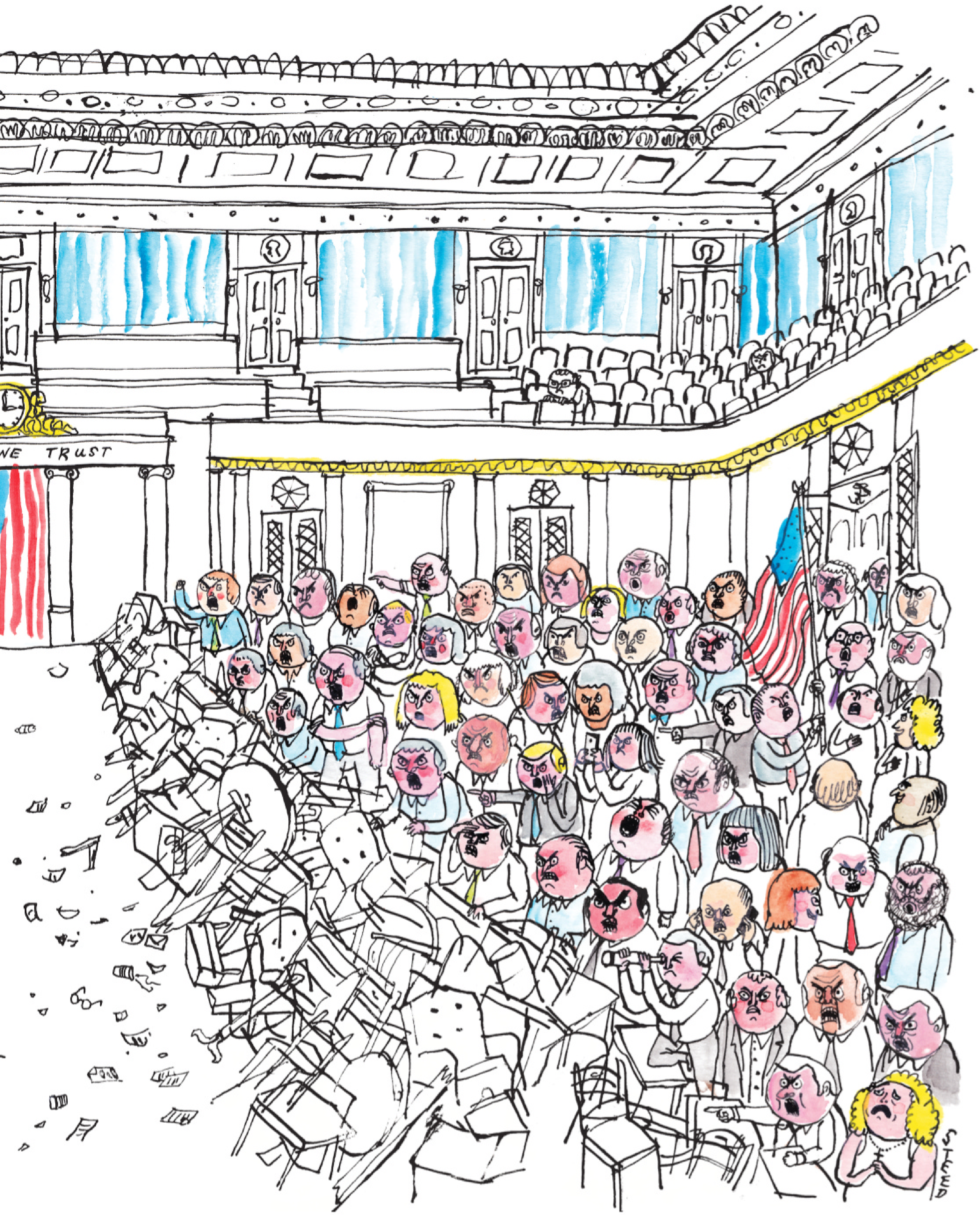
Watching the event in Tel Aviv, the former Israeli intelligence officer was uneasy. "Something is bothering me," he said. "If I want to lower the flames, I will bury him with three or five hundred people, even with the leadership there. I will keep it very quiet." This was nothing like the fraught sendoff for Mughniyeh after the bombing in Damascus, or the unceremonious disposal of Suleiman's remains. The leaders of Iran settled on a very different message. "There were millions of people in the streets of Iran," he said. "For three days. They're transmitting to the Iranian people: They will never be able to forgive." ♦

"Look—I'm cold, you're cold. Why don't we settle down and start a family?"

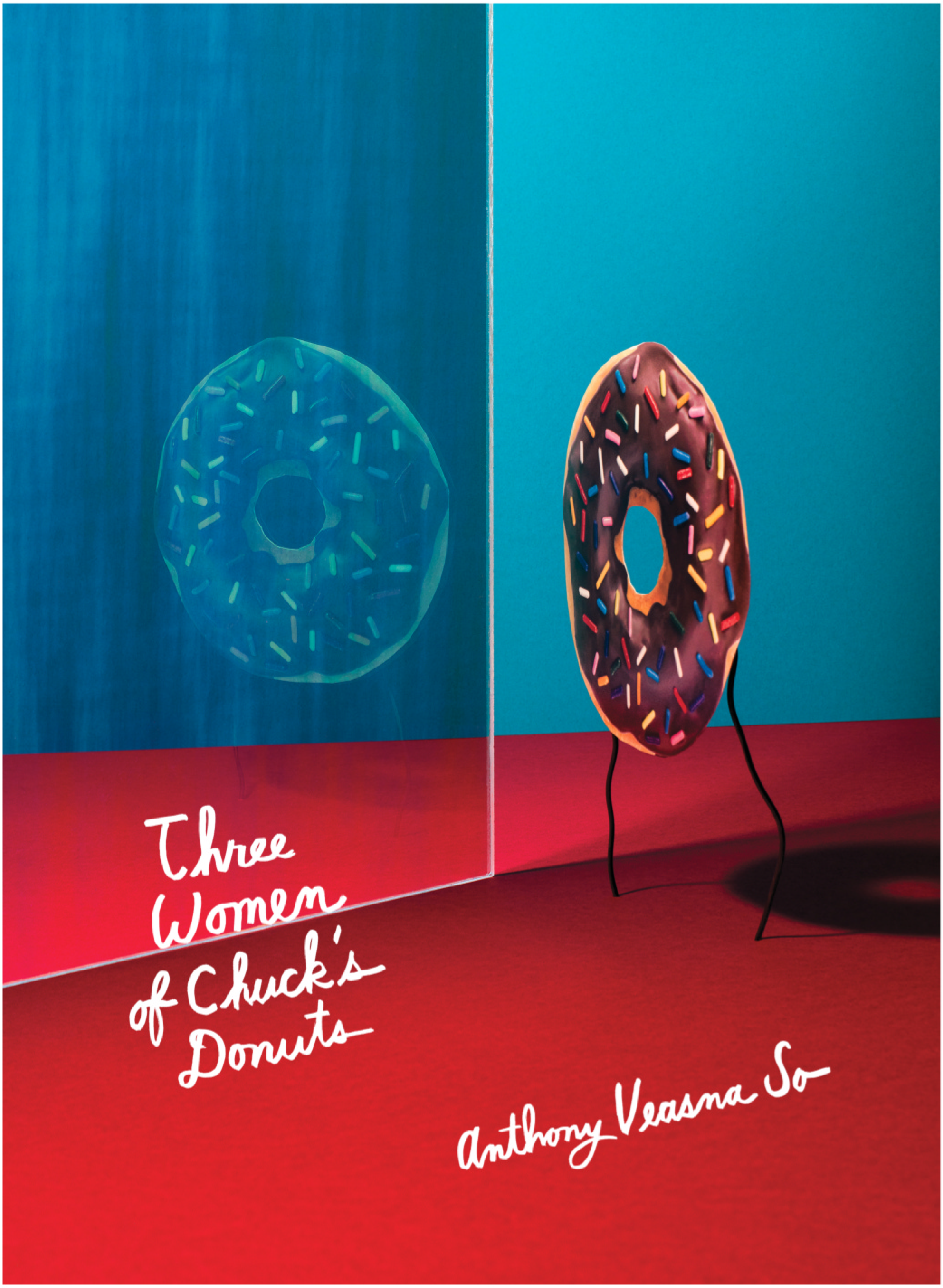
• •

SKETCHBOOK BY EDWARD STEED





WE TRUST



Three Women of Chuck's Donuts

Anthony Veasna So

TYPOGRAPHY BY BRIAN REA

PHOTOGRAPH BY GABRIEL ZIMMER

The first night the man orders an apple fritter, it is three in the morning, the street lamp is broken, and the nightly fog obscures the waterfront's run-down buildings, except for Chuck's Donuts, with its cool fluorescent glow. "Isn't it a bit early for an apple fritter?" the owner's twelve-year-old daughter, Kayley, deadpans from behind the counter, and Tevy, four years older, rolls her eyes and says to her sister, "You watch too much TV."

The man ignores them both, sits down at a booth, and proceeds to stare out the window, at the busted potential of this small city's downtown. Kayley studies the man's reflection in the window. He's older but not old, younger than her parents, and his wiry mustache seems misplaced, from a different decade. His face wears an expression full of those mixed-up emotions that only adults must feel, like *plaintive*, say, or *wretched*. His light-gray suit is dishevelled, his tie undone.

An hour passes. Kayley whispers to Tevy, "It looks like he's just staring at his own face," to which Tevy says, "I'm trying to study."

The man finally leaves. His apple fritter remains untouched on the table.

"What a trip," Kayley says. "Wonder if he's Cambodian."

"Not every Asian person in this city is Cambodian," Tevy says.

Approaching the empty booth, Kayley examines the apple fritter more closely. "Why would you come in here, sit for an hour, and not eat?"

Tevy stays focussed on the open book resting on the laminate countertop.

Their mom walks in from the kitchen, holding a tray of glazed doughnuts. She is the owner, though she isn't named Chuck—her name is Sothy—and she's never met a Chuck in her life; she simply thought the name was American enough to draw customers. She slides the tray into a cooling rack, then scans the room to make sure her daughters have not let another homeless man inside.

"How can the street lamp be out?" Sothy exclaims. "Again!" She approaches the windows and tries to look outside but sees mostly her own reflection—stubby limbs sprouting from a grease-stained apron, a plump face topped by a cheap hairnet. This is a needlessly harsh view of herself, but Sothy's perception of the world becomes distorted when she stays in the kitchen too long, kneading dough until time itself seems measured in the number of doughnuts produced. "We will lose customers if this keeps happening."

"It's fine," Tevy says, not looking up from her book. "A customer just came in."

"Yeah, this weird man sat here for, like, an hour," Kayley says.

"How many doughnuts did he buy?" Sothy asks.

"Just that," Kayley says, pointing at the apple fritter still sitting on the table.

Sothy sighs. "Tevy, call P.G. & E."

Tevy looks up from her book. "They aren't gonna answer."

"Leave a message," Sothy says, glaring at her older daughter.

"I bet we can resell this apple fritter," Kayley says. "I swear, he didn't touch it. I watched him the whole time."

"Kayley, don't stare at customers," Sothy says, before returning to the kitchen, where she starts prepping more dough, wondering yet again how practical it is to drag her daughters here every night. Maybe Chuck's Donuts should be open during normal times only, not for twenty-four hours each day, and maybe her daughters should go to live with their father, at least some of the time, even if he can hardly be trusted after what he pulled.

She contemplates her hands, the skin discolored and rough, at once wrinkled and sinewy. They are the hands of her mother, who fried homemade *cha quai* in the markets of Battambang until she grew old and tired and the markets disappeared and her hands went from twisting dough to picking rice in order to serve the Communist ideals of a genocidal regime. How funny, Sothy thinks, that decades after the camps she lives here in California, as a business owner, with her American-born Cambodian daughters who have grown healthy and stubborn, and still, in this new life she has created, her hands have aged into her mother's.

Weeks ago, Sothy's only nighttime employee quit. Tired, he said, of his warped sleeping schedule, of how his dreams had slipped into a deranged place. And so a deal was struck for the summer: Sothy would refrain from hiring a new employee until September, and Tevy and Kayley would work alongside their mother, with the money saved going directly into their college funds. Inverting their lives, Tevy and Kayley would sleep during the hot, oppressive days, manning the cash register at night.

Despite some initial indignation, Tevy and Kayley of course agreed. The first two years after it opened—when Kayley was eight, Tevy not yet stricken by teen-age resentment, and Sothy still married—Chuck's Donuts seemed blessed with good business. Imagine the downtown streets before the housing crisis, before the city declared bankruptcy and earned the title Foreclosure Capital of America. Imagine Chuck's Donuts surrounded by bustling bars and restaurants and a new IMAX movie theatre, all filled with people still in denial about their impossible mortgages. Consider Tevy and Kayley at Chuck's Donuts after school each day—how they developed inside jokes with their mother, how they sold doughnuts so fast they felt like athletes, and how they looked out the store windows and saw a whirl of energy circling them.

Now consider how, in the wake of learning about their father's second family, in the next town over, Tevy and Kayley cling to their memories of Chuck's Donuts. Even with the recession wiping out almost every downtown business, and driving away their nighttime customers, save for the odd worn-out worker from the nearby hospital, consider these summer nights, endless under the fluorescent lights, the family's last pillars of support. Imagine Chuck's Donuts a mausoleum to their glorious past.

The second night the man orders an apple fritter, he sits in the same booth. It is one in the morning, though the street lamp still emits a dark nothing. He stares out the window all the same, and once more leaves his apple fritter untouched. Three days have passed since his first visit. Kayley crouches down, hiding behind the counter, as she watches the man through the doughnut display case. He wears a dark-gray suit, she notes, instead of the light-gray one, and his hair seems greasier.

"Isn't it weird that his hair is greasier than last time even though it's earlier in the night?” she asks Tevy, to which Tevy, deep in her book, answers, “That’s a false causality, to assume that his hair grease is a direct result of time passing.”

And Kayley responds, “Well, doesn’t *your* hair get greasier throughout the day?”

And Tevy says, “You can’t assume that all hair gets greasy. Like, we know *your* hair gets gross in the summer.”

And Sothy, walking in, says, “Her hair wouldn’t be greasy if she washed it.” She wraps her arm around Kayley, pulls her close, and sniffs her head. “You smell bad, *oun*. How did I raise such a dirty daughter?” she says loudly.

“Like mother, like daughter,” Tevy says, and Sothy whacks her head.

“Isn’t *that* a false causality?” Kayley asks. “Assuming I’m like Mom just because I’m her daughter.” She points at her sister’s book. “Whoever wrote that would be ashamed of you.”

Tevy closes her book and slams it into Kayley’s side, whereupon Kayley digs her ragged nails into Tevy’s arm, all of which prompts Sothy to grab them both by their wrists as she dresses them down in Khmer. As her mother’s grip tightens around her wrist, Kayley sees, from the corner of her eye, that the man has turned away from the window and is looking directly at them, all three of them “acting like hotheads,” as her father used to say. The man’s face seems flush with disapproval, and, in this moment, she wishes she were invisible.

Still gripping her daughters’ wrists, Sothy starts pulling them toward the kitchen’s swinging doors. “Help me glaze the doughnuts!” she commands. “I’m tired of doing everything!”

“We can’t just leave this man in the seating area,” Kayley protests, through clenched teeth.

Sothy glances at the man. “He’s fine,” she says. “He’s Khmer.”

“You don’t need to drag me,” Tevy says, breaking free from her mother’s grip, but it’s too late, and they are in the kitchen, overdosing on the smell of yeast and burning air from the ovens.

Sothy, Tevy, and Kayley gather around the kitchen island. Trays of freshly fried dough, golden and bare, sit next to a bath of glaze. Sothy picks up a naked doughnut and dips it in the glaze. When she lifts the doughnut back into the air, trails of white goo trickle off it.

Kayley looks at the kitchen doors. “What if this entire time that man hasn’t been staring out the window?” she asks Tevy. “What if he’s been watching *us* in the reflection?”

“It’s kind of impossible not to do both at the same time,” Tevy answers, and she dunks two doughnuts in the glaze, one in each hand.

“That’s just so creepy,” Kayley says, an exhilaration blooming within her.

“Get to work,” Sothy snaps.

Kayley sighs and picks up a doughnut.

Annoyed as she is by Kayley’s whims, Tevy cannot deny being intrigued by the man as well. Who is he, anyway? Is he so rich he can buy apple fritters only to let them sit uneaten? By his fifth visit, his fifth untouched apple fritter, his fifth decision to sit in the same booth, Tevy finds the man worthy of observation, inquiry, and analysis—a subject she might even write about for her philosophy paper.

The summer class she’s taking, at the community college, next to the abandoned mall, is called “Knowing.” Surely, writing about this man, and the questions that arise when confronting him as a philosophical subject, could earn Tevy an A in her class, which would impress college admissions committees next year. Maybe it would even win her a fancy scholarship, allowing her to escape this depressed city.

“Knowing” initially caught Tevy’s eye because it didn’t require any math prerequisites; the coursework involved only reading, a fifteen-page paper, and morning lectures, which she could attend before going home to sleep in the afternoon. Tevy doesn’t understand most of the readings, but then neither does the professor, she speculates, who looks like a homeless man the community college found on the street. Still, reading Wittgenstein is a compelling enough way to pass the dead hours of the night.

Tevy’s philosophical interest in the man was sparked when her mother revealed that she knew, from only a glance, that he was Khmer.

“Like, how can you be sure?” Kayley whispered on the man’s third visit, wrinkling her nose in doubt.

Sothy finished arranging the doughnuts in the display case, then glanced at the man and said, “Of course he is Khmer.” And that “of course” compelled Tevy to raise her head from her book. *Of course*, her mother’s condescending voice echoed, the words ping-ponging through Tevy’s head, as she stared at the man. *Of course*, *of course*.

Throughout her sixteen years of life, her parents’ ability to intuit all aspects of being Khmer, or emphatically *not* being Khmer, has always amazed and frustrated Tevy. She’d do something as simple as drink a glass of ice water, and her father, from across the room, would bellow, “There were no ice cubes in the genocide!” Then he’d lament, “How did my kids become so *not* Khmer?,” before bursting into rueful laughter. Other times, she’d eat a piece of dried fish or scratch her scalp or walk with a certain gait, and her father would smile and say, “Now I know you are Khmer.”

What does it mean to be Khmer, anyway? How does one know what is and is not Khmer? Have most Khmer people always known, deep down, that they’re Khmer? Are there feelings Khmer people experience that others don’t?

Variations of these questions used to flash through Tevy’s mind whenever her father visited them at Chuck’s Donuts, back before the divorce. Carrying a container of papaya salad, he’d step into the middle of the room, and, ignoring any customers, he’d sniff his papaya salad and shout, “Nothing makes me feel more Khmer than the smell of fish sauce and fried dough!”

Being Khmer, as far as Tevy can tell, can’t be reduced to the brown skin, black hair, and prominent cheekbones that she shares with her mother and sister. Khmer-ness can manifest as anything, from the color of your cuticles to the particular way your butt goes numb when you sit in a chair too long, and, even so, Tevy has recognized nothing she has ever done as being notably Khmer. And, now that she’s old enough to disavow her lying cheater of a father, Tevy feels completely detached from what she was apparently born as. Unable to imagine what her father felt as he stood in Chuck's Donuts sniffing fish sauce, she can only laugh. Even now, when she can no longer stomach seeing him, she laughs when she thinks about her father.

Tevy carries little guilt about her detachment from her culture. At times, though, she feels overwhelmed, as if her thoughts are coiling through her brain, as if her head will explode. This is what drives her to join Kayley in the pursuit of discovering all there is to know about the man.

One night, Kayley decides that the man is the spitting image of her father. It's unreal, she argues. "Just look at him," she mutters, changing the coffee filters in the industrial brewers. "They have the same chin. Same hair. Same everything."

Sothy, placing fresh doughnuts in the display case, responds, "Be careful with those machines."

"Dumbass," Tevy hisses, refilling the cannisters of cream and sugar. "Don't you think Mom would've *noticed* by now if he looked like Dad?"

By this point, Sothy, Tevy, and Kayley have grown accustomed to the man's presence, aware that on any given night he may appear sometime between midnight and four. The daughters whisper about him, half hoping that where he sits is out of earshot, half hoping he'll overhear them. Kayley speculates about his motives: if he's a police officer on a stakeout, say, or a criminal on the run. She deliberates over whether he's a good man or a bad one. Tevy, on the other hand, theorizes about the man's purpose—if, for example, he feels detached from the world and can center himself only here, in Chuck's Donuts, around other Khmer people. Both sisters wonder about his life: the kind of women he attracts and has dated; the women he has spurned; whether he has siblings, or kids; whether he looks more like his mother or father.

Sothy ignores them. She is tired of thinking about other people, especially these customers from whom she barely profits.

"Mom, you see what I'm seeing, right?" Kayley says, to no response. "You're not even listening, are you?"

"Why *should* she listen to you?" Tevy snaps.

Kayley throws her arms up. "You're just being mean because you think the man is *hot*," she retorts. "You basically said so yesterday. You're like this gross person who thinks her dad is hot, only now you're taking it out on *me*. And he looks just like Dad, for your information. I brought a picture to prove it." She pulls a photograph from her pocket and holds it up with one hand.

Bright red sears itself onto Tevy's cheeks. "I did *not* say that," she states, and, from across the counter, she tries to snatch the photo from Kayley, only to succeed in knocking an industrial coffee brewer to the ground.

Hearing metal parts clang on the ground and scatter, Sothy finally turns her attention to her daughters. "What did I tell you, Kayley!" she yells, her entire face tense with anger.

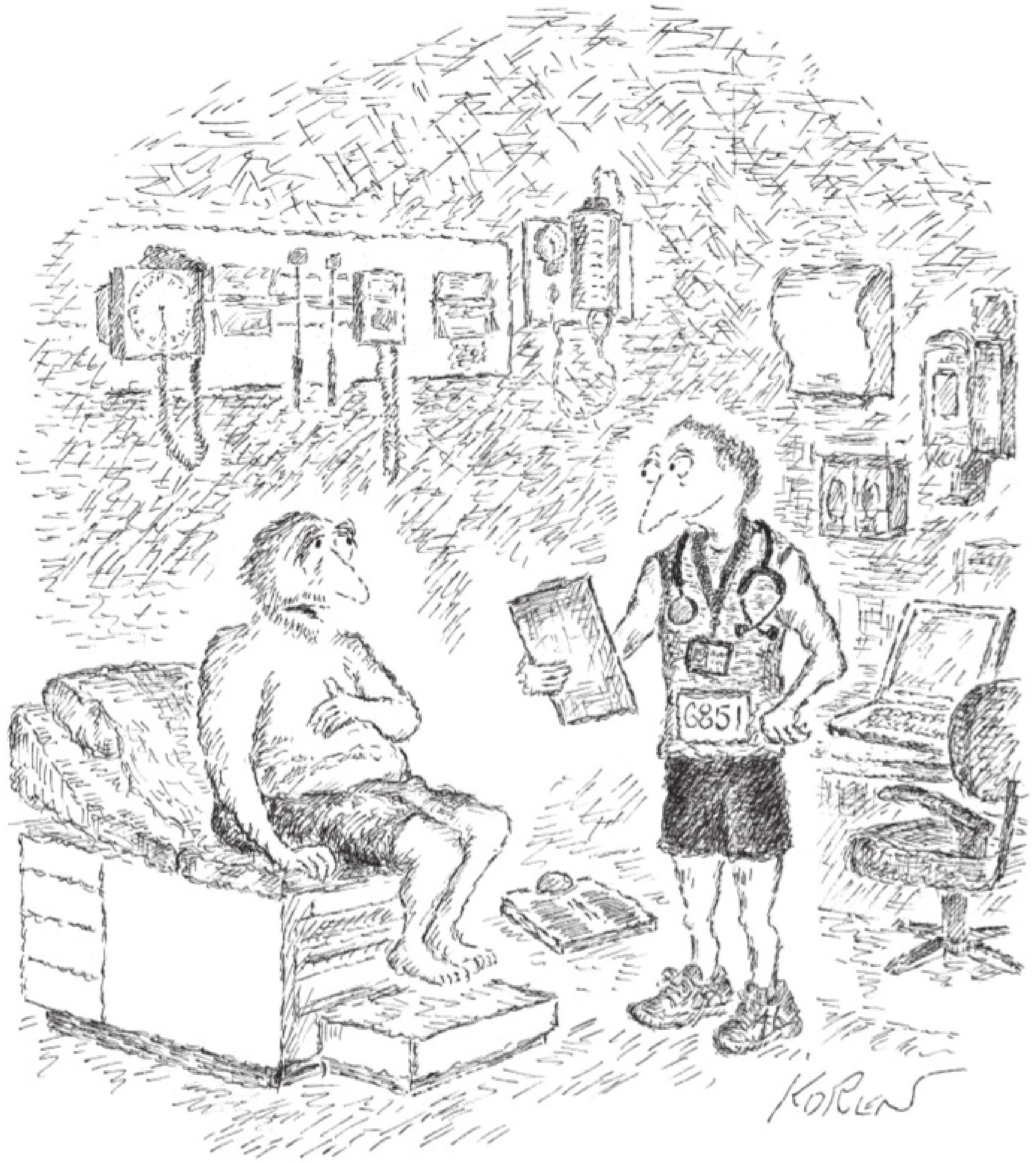
"Why are you yelling at *me*? This is *her* fault!" Kayley gestures wildly toward her sister. Tevy, seeing the opportunity, grabs the photo. "Give that back to me," Kayley demands. "You don't even *like* Dad. You never have."

And Tevy says, "Then you're contradicting yourself, aren't you?" Her face still burning, she tries to recapture an even, analytical tone. "So which is it? Am I in love with Dad or do I, like, hate him?" she asks. "You are so stupid. I wasn't saying the man was hot, anyway. I just pointed out that he's not, like, *ugly*."

"I'm tired of this bullshit," Kayley responds. "You guys treat me like I'm nothing."

Surveying the damage her daughters have caused, Sothy snatches the photograph from Tevy. "Clean this mess up!" she yells, and then walks out of the seating area, exasperated.

In the bathroom, Sothy splashes water on her face. She looks at her reflection in the mirror, noticing the bags under



"What's the verdict, Doc—exercise?"

her eyes, the wrinkles fracturing her skin, then she looks down at the photo she's laid next to the faucet. Her ex-husband's youth taunts her with its boyish charm. She cannot imagine the young man in this image—decked out in his tight polo and acid-washed jeans, high on his newfound citizenship—becoming the father who has infected her daughters with so much anxious energy, and who has abandoned her, middle-aged, with obligations she can barely fulfill alone.

Stuffing the photo into the pocket of her apron, Sothy gathers her composure. Had she not left her daughters, she would have seen the man get up from the booth, turn to face the two girls, and walk into the dark hallway that leads to the bathroom. She would not have opened the bathroom door to find this man towering over her with his silent, sulking presence. And she would never have recognized it, the uncanny resemblance to her ex-husband that her younger daughter has been raving about all night.

But Sothy does now register the resemblance, along with a sudden pain in her gut. The man's gaze slams into her, like a punch. It beams a focussed chaos, a dim malice, and even though the man merely drifts past her, taking her place in the bathroom, Sothy can't help but think, They've come for us.

I TRUST THE WIND AND DON'T KNOW WHY

I am not the girl in the picture.
I am not the smell of hyacinths.
I might be the boy.
I am off the record.

I am not a view from the island,
not the sound of waves breaking,
not parasols scattered on sand.
I am closed for the season.

I'm fingerprints on windows
that look out on rain.
I am rain that rains harder.

I'm not the new fashion, not
hands on a clock. I don't spring
forward. Cannot turn back.

I am yellow caution tape
strung from pole to pole:
Police line do not cross.

I see the sky but nothing in it,
just spots on the sun.
Then the long twilight.
Then the crackle of stars.

—*Wyn Cooper*

Ever since her divorce, Sothy has worked through her days weighed down by the pressure of supporting her daughters without her ex-husband. Exhaustion grinds away at her bones. Her wrists rattle with carpal-tunnel syndrome. And rest is not an option. If anything, it consumes more of her energy. A lull in her day, a moment to reflect, and the resentment comes crashing down over her. It isn't the cheating she's mad about, the affair, her daughters' frivolous stepmother who calls her with misguided attempts at reconciliation. Her attraction to her ex-husband, and his to her, dissolved at a steady rate after her first pregnancy. The same cannot be said of their financial contract. That imploded spectacularly.

Her daughters have no idea, but when Sothy opened Chuck's Donuts it was with the help of a generous loan from her ex-husband's distant uncle, an influential business tycoon based in Phnom Penh with a reputation for funding political corruption. She'd heard wild rumors about this uncle, even here in California—that he was responsible for the imprisonment of the Prime Minister's main political opponent, that he'd gained his riches by joining a criminal organization of ex-Khmer Rouge officials, and that he'd arranged, on behalf of powerful and petty Khmer Rouge sympathizers, the murder of Haing S. Ngor. Sothy didn't know if she wanted to accept the uncle's money, to be indebted to such dark forces, to commit to a life in which she would always be afraid that hit men disguised as Khmer-American gangbangers might gun her and her family down and then cover it up as a simple mugging gone wrong. If even Haing S. Ngor, the Oscar-winning movie star of "The Killing Fields," wasn't safe from this fate, if he couldn't escape the spite of the powerful, how could Sothy think that her own family would be spared? Then again, what else was Sothy supposed to do, with a G.E.D., a husband who worked as a janitor, and two small children? How else could she and her husband jump-start their dire finances? What skills did she have, other than frying dough?

Deep down, Sothy has always understood that it was a bad idea to get into business with her ex-husband's uncle, who, for all she knew, could have bankrolled Pol Pot's coup. And so, now, seeing the man's resemblance to her ex-husband, she wonders if he could be some distant gangster cousin. She fears that her past has finally caught up with her.

For several days, the man does not visit Chuck's Donuts. But Sothy's worries only deepen. They root themselves into her bones. Her daughters' constant musings about the man only intensify her suspicion that he is a relative of her former uncle-in-law. He has come to take their lives, to torture the money out of them, perhaps to hold her daughters as collateral, investments to sell on the black market. Still, she can't risk being impulsive, lest she provoke him. And there's the possibility, of course, that he's a complete stranger. Surely he would have harmed them by now. Why this performance of waiting? She keeps herself on guard, tells her daughters to be wary of the man, to call for her if he walks through the door.

Tevy has started writing her philosophy paper, and Kayley is helping her. "On Whether Being Khmer Means You Understand Khmer People," the paper is tentatively titled. Tevy's professor requires students to title their essays in the style of "On Certainty," as if starting a title with the word "On" makes it philosophical. She decides to structure her paper as a catalogue of assumptions made about the man based on the idea that he is Khmer and that the persons making these assumptions—Tevy and Kayley—are also Khmer. Each assumption will be accompanied by a paragraph discussing the validity of the assumption, which will be determined based on answers provided by the man, to questions that Tevy and Kayley will ask him directly. Both Tevy and Kayley agree to keep the nature of the paper secret from their mother.

The sisters spend several nights refining their list of assumptions about the man. "Maybe he also grew up with parents who never liked each other," Kayley says one night when the downtown appears less bleak, the dust and pollution lending the dark sky a red glow.

"Well, it's not like Khmer people marry for love," Tevy responds.

Kayley looks out the window for anything worth observing, but sees only empty streets, the dull orange of the Little Caesars, which her mother hates because the manager won't allow her customers to park in his excessively big lot. "It just seems like he's always looking for someone, you know?" Kayley says. "Maybe he loves someone but that person doesn't love him back."

"Do you remember what Dad said about marriage?" Tevy asks. "He said that, after the camps, people paired up based on their skills. Two people who knew how to cook wouldn't marry, because that would be, like, a waste. If one person in the marriage cooked, then the other person should know how to sell food. He said marriage is like the show 'Survivor,' where you make alliances in order to live longer. He thought 'Survivor' was actually the most Khmer thing possible, and he would definitely win it, because the genocide was the best training he could've got."

"What were their skills?" Kayley asks. "Mom and Dad's?"

"The answer to that question is probably the reason they didn't work out," Tevy says.

"What does this have to do with the man?" Kayley asks.

And Tevy responds, "Well, if Khmer people marry for skills, as Dad says, maybe it means it's harder for Khmer people to know how to love. Maybe we're just bad at it—loving, you know—and maybe that's the man's problem."

"Have you ever been in love?" Kayley asks.

"No," Tevy says, and they sit in silence. They can hear their mother baking in the kitchen, the routine clanging of mixers and trays, a string of sounds that always just fails to coalesce into melody.

Tevy wonders if her mother has ever loved someone romantically, if her mother is even capable of reaching beyond the realm of survival, if her mother has ever been granted any freedom from worry, and if her mother's present carries the ability to dilate, for even a brief moment, into its own plane of suspended existence, separate from past or future. Kayley, on the other hand, wonders if her mother misses her father, and, if not, whether this means that Kayley's own feelings of gloom, of isolation, of longing, are less valid than she believes. She wonders if the violent chasm between her parents also exists within her own body, because isn't she just a mix of all those antithetical genes?

"Mom should start smoking," Kayley says.

And Tevy asks, "Why?"

"It'd force her to take breaks," Kayley says. "Every time she wanted to smoke, she'd stop working, go outside, and smoke."

"Depends on what would kill her faster," Tevy says. "Smoking or working too much."

Then Kayley asks, softly, "Do you think Dad loves his new wife?"

Tevy answers, "He better."

Here's how Sothy and her ex-husband were supposed to handle their deal with the uncle: Every month, Sothy would give her then husband twenty per cent of Chuck's Donuts' profits. Every month, her then husband would wire that money to his uncle. And every month, they would be one step closer to paying off their loan before anyone with ties to criminal activity could bat an eyelash.

Here's what actually happened: One day, weeks before she discovered that her husband had conceived two sons with another woman while they were married, Sothy received a call at Chuck's Donuts. It was a man speaking in Khmer, his accent thick and pure. At first, Sothy hardly understood what he was saying. His sentences were too fluid, his pronunciation too proper. He didn't truncate his words, the way so many Khmer-American immigrants did, and Sothy found herself lulled into a daze by those long-lost syllables. Then she heard what the man's words actually meant. He was the accountant of her husband's uncle. He was asking about their loan, whether they had any intention of paying it back. It had been years, and the uncle hadn't received any payments, the accountant said with menacing regret.

Sothy later found out—from her husband's guilt-stricken mistress, of all people—that her husband had used the profits she'd given him, the money intended to pay off their loan, to support his second family. In the divorce settlement, Sothy agreed not to collect child support, in exchange for sole ownership of Chuck's Donuts, for custody of their daughters, and for her ex-husband's promise to talk to his uncle and to eventually pay off their loan, this time with his own money. He had never intended to cheat his uncle, he proclaimed. He had simply fallen in love with another woman. It was true love. What else could he do? And, of course, he had an obligation to his other children, the sons who bore his name.

Still, he promised to right this wrong. But how can Sothy trust her ex-husband? Will a man sent by the uncle one day appear at her doorstep, or at Chuck's Donuts, or in the alley behind Chuck's Donuts, and right their wrong for them? A promise is a promise, yet, in the end, it is only that.

An entire week has passed since the man's last visit. Sothy's fears have begun to wane. There are too many doughnuts to make, too many bills to pay. It helped, too, when she called her ex-husband to yell at him.

"You selfish pig of a man," she said. "You better be paying your uncle back. You better not put your daughters in danger. You better not be doing the same things you've always done—thinking only about yourself and what *you* want. I can't even talk to you right now. If your uncle sends someone to collect money from me, I will tell him how disgraceful you are. I will tell him how to find you and then you'll face the consequences of being who you are, who you've always been. Remember, I know you better than anyone."

She hung up before he could respond, and, even though this call hasn't gained her any real security, she feels better. She almost wants the man to be a hit man sent by the uncle, so that she can direct him straight to her ex-husband. Not that she wants her ex-husband to be killed. But she does want to see him punished.

The night the man returns, Sothy, Tevy, and Kayley are preparing a catering order for the hospital three blocks over. Sothy needs to deliver a hundred doughnuts to the hospital before eleven-thirty. The gig pays good money, more money than Chuck's Donuts has made all month. Sothy would rather not leave her daughters alone, but she cannot send them to deliver the doughnuts. She'll be gone only an hour. And what can happen? The man never shows up before midnight, anyway.

Just in case, she decides to close the store during her delivery. "Keep this door locked while I'm gone," she tells her daughters after loading her car.

"Why are you so insecure about everything?" Tevy says.

And Kayley says, "We're not babies."

Sothy looks them in the eyes. "Please, just be safe."

The door is locked, but the owners' daughters are clearly inside; you can see them through the illuminated windows, sitting at the counter. So the man stands at the glass door and waits. He stares at the daughters until they notice a shadow in a suit hovering outside.

The man waves for them to let him enter, and Kayley says to her sister, "Weird—it looks like he's been in a fight."

And Tevy, noticing the man's messy hair and haunted expression, says, "We need to interview him." She hesitates just a moment before unlocking the door, cracking it open. Inflamed scratches crisscross his neck. Smudges of dirt mottle his wrinkled white shirt.

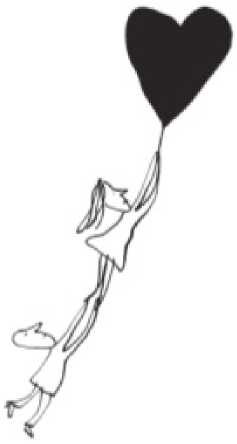
"I need to get inside," he says gravely. It's the only thing Tevy has heard him say other than "I'll have an apple fritter."

"Our mom told us not to let anyone in," Tevy says.

"I need to get inside," the man repeats, and who is Tevy to ignore the man's sense of purpose?

"Fine," Tevy says, "but you have to let me interview you for a class assignment." She looks him over again, considers his bedraggled appearance. "And you still need to buy something."

The man nods and Tevy opens the door for him. As he crosses the threshold, dread washes over Kayley as she becomes aware of the fact that she and her sister know nothing at all about the man. All their deliberations concerning his presence have got them nowhere, really, and right now the only things Kayley truly knows are: she is a child; her sister is not quite an adult; and they are betraying their mother's wishes.



Soon Tevy and Kayley are sitting across from the man in his booth. Scribbled notes and an apple fritter are laid out between them on the table. The man stares out the window, as always, and, as always, the sisters study his face.

"Should we start?" Tevy asks.

The man says nothing.

Tevy tries again. "Can we start?"

"Yes, we can start," the man says, still staring out into the dark night.

The interview begins with the question "You're Khmer, right?" and then a pause, a consideration. Tevy meant this to be a softball question, a warmup for her groundbreaking points of investigation, but the man's silence unnerves her.

Finally, the man speaks. "I am from Cambodia, but I'm not Cambodian. I'm not Khmer."

And Tevy, feeling sick to her stomach, asks, "Wait, what do you mean?" She looks at her notes, but they aren't any help. She looks at Kayley, but she isn't any help, either. Her sister is as confused as she is.

"My family is Chinese," the man continues. "For several generations, we've married Chinese-Cambodians."

"O.K., so you are Chinese *ethnically*, and not Khmer ethnically, but you're still Cambodian, right?" Tevy asks.

"Only I call myself Chinese," the man answers.

"But your family has lived in Cambodia for generations?" Kayley interjects.

"Yes."

"And you and your family survived the Khmer Rouge regime?" Tevy asks.

Again, the man answers, "Yes."

"So do you speak Khmer or Chinese?"

The man answers, "I speak Khmer."

"Do you celebrate Cambodian New Year?"

Again, the man answers, "Yes."

"Do you eat rotten fish?" Kayley asks.

"*Prahok*?" the man asks. "Yes, I do."

"Do you buy food from the Khmer grocery store or the Chinese one?" Tevy asks.

The man answers, "Khmer."

"What's the difference between a Chinese family living in Cambodia and a Khmer family living in Cambodia?" Tevy asks. "Aren't they both still Cambodian? If they both speak Khmer, if they both survived the same experiences, if they both do the same things, wouldn't that make a Chinese family living in Cambodia somewhat Cambodian?"

The man doesn't look at Tevy or Kayley. Throughout the interview, his eyes have searched for something outside. "My father told me that I am Chinese," the man answers. "He told me that his sons, like all other sons in our family, should marry only Chinese women."

"Well, what about being American?" Tevy asks. "Do you consider yourself American?"

The man answers, "I live in America, and I am Chinese."

"So you don't consider yourself Cambodian at all?" Kayley asks.

He turns his gaze away from the window. For the first time in their conversation, he considers the sisters sitting across from him. "You two don't look Khmer," he says. "You look like you have Chinese blood."

"How can you tell?" Tevy asks, startled, her cheeks burning.

The man answers, "It's in the face."

"Well, we are," Tevy says. "Khmer, I mean."

And Kayley says, "Actually, I think Mom said once that one of our great-grandfathers was Chinese."

"Shut up," Tevy says.

And Kayley responds, "God, I was just saying."

The man stops looking at them. "We're done here. I need to focus."

"But I haven't asked my real questions," Tevy protests.

The man says, "One more question."

"Why do you never eat the apple fritters you buy?!" Kayley blurts out before Tevy even glances at her notes.

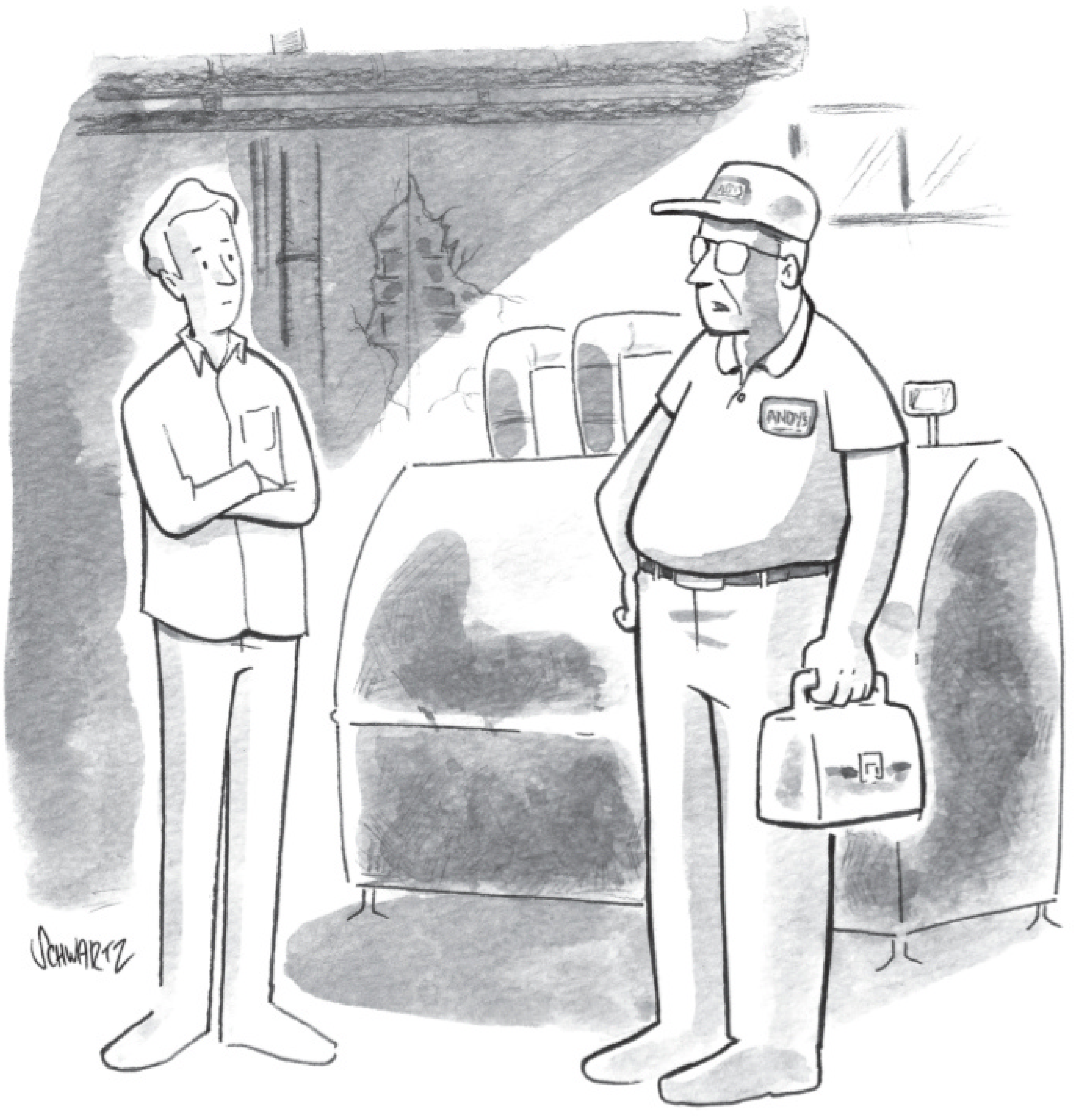
"I don't like doughnuts," the man answers.

The conversation comes to a halt, as Tevy finds this latest answer the most convincing argument the man has made for not being Khmer.

"You can't be serious," Kayley says after a moment. "Then why do you buy so many apple fritters?"

The man doesn't answer. His eyes straining, he leans even closer to the window's surface, almost grazing the glass with his nose.

Tevy looks down at the back of her hands. She examines the lightness of her brown skin. She remembers how in elementary school she always got so mad at the white kids who misidentified her as Chinese, sometimes even getting in fights with them on the bus. And she remembers her father consoling her in his truck at the bus stop. "I know I joke around a lot," he said once, his hand on her shoulder. "But you are Khmer, through and through. You should know that."



"You can replace the tank, switch to natural gas, or huddle in a corner and cry as you ask yourself why you ever thought buying a house was a good idea."

Tevy examines the man's reflection. His vision of the world disappoints her—the idea that people are limited always to what their fathers tell them. Then Tevy notices her sister reeling in discomfort.

"*No*," Kayley says, hitting the table with her fists. "You *have* to have a better answer than that. You can't just come in here almost every night, order an apple fritter, not eat it, and then tell us you *don't like doughnuts*." Breathing heavily, Kayley leans forward, the edge of the table cutting into her ribs.

"Kayley," Tevy says, concerned. "What's going on with you?"

"Be quiet!" the man yells abruptly, still staring out the window, violently swinging his arm.

Shocked into a frozen silence, the sisters don't know how to respond, and can only watch as the man stands up, clenching his fists, and charges into the center of the seating area. Right then, a woman—probably Khmer, or maybe Chinese-Cambodian, or maybe just Chinese—bursts into Chuck's Donuts and starts striking the man with her purse.

"So you're spying on me?" the woman screams.

She is covered in bruises, the sisters see, her left eye nearly swollen shut. They stay in the booth, pressed against the cold glass of the window.

"You beat your own wife, *and* you spy on her," she says, now battering the man, her husband, with slaps. "You're—"

The man tries to push his wife away, but she hurls her body into his, and then they are on the ground, the woman on top of the man, slapping his head over and over again.

"You're scum, you're scum," the woman shrieks, and the sisters have no idea how to stop the violence that is unfolding before them, or whether they should try. They cannot even say whom they feel aligned with—the man, to whose presence they have grown attached, or the bruised woman, whose explosive anger toward the man appears warranted. They remember those punctuated moments of Chuck's Donuts' past, before the recession forced everyone into paralysis, when the dark energy of their home town barrelled into the fluorescent seating area. They remember the drive-by gang shootings, the homeless people lying in the alley in heroin-induced comas, the robberies of neighboring businesses, and even of Chuck's Donuts once; they remember how, every now and then, they would feel panicked that their mother wouldn't make it home. They remember the underbelly of their glorious past.

The man is now on top of the woman. He screams, "You've *betrayed* me." He punches her face. The sisters shut their eyes and wish for the man to go away, and the woman, too. They wish these people had never set foot in Chuck's Donuts, and they keep their eyes closed, holding each other, until suddenly they hear a loud blow, then another, followed by a dull thud.

Their eyes flick open to find their mother helping the woman sit upright. On the ground lies a cast-iron pan, the one that's used when the rare customer orders an egg sandwich, and beside it, unconscious, the man, blood leaking from his head. Brushing hair out of the woman's face, their mother consoles this stranger. Their mother and the woman remain like this for a moment, neither of them acknowledging the man on the ground.

Still seated in the booth with Kayley clinging to her, Tevy thinks about the signs, all the signs there have been not to trust this man. She looks down at the ground, at the blood seeping onto the floor, how the color almost matches the red laminate of the countertops. She wonders if the man, in the unconscious layers of his mind, still feels Chinese.

Then Sothy asks the woman, "Are you O.K.?"

But the woman, struggling to stand up, just looks at her husband.

Again, Sothy asks, "Are you O.K.?"

"Fuck," the woman says, shaking her head. "Fuck, fuck, *fuck*."

"It's all right," Sothy says, reaching to touch her, but the woman is already rushing out the door.

Emotion drains out of Sothy's face. She is stunned by this latest abandonment, speechless, and so is Tevy, but Kayley calls after the woman, yelling, even though it's too late, "You can't just leave!"

And then Sothy bursts into laughter. She knows that this isn't the appropriate response, that it will leave her daughters more disturbed, just as she knows that there are so many present liabilities—for instance, the fact that she has severely injured one of her own customers, and not even to protect her children from a vicious gangster. But she can't stop laughing. She can't stop thinking of the absurdity of this situation, how if she were in the woman's shoes she also would have left.

Finally, Sothy calms herself. "Help me clean this up," she says, facing her daughters, giving the slightest of nods toward the man on the ground, as though he were any other mess. "Customers can't see blood so close to the doughnuts."

Both Sothy and Tevy agree that Kayley is too young to handle blood, so, while her mother and sister prop the man up against the counter and begin cleaning the floors, Kayley calls 911 from behind the counter. She tells the operator that the man is unconscious, that he's taken a hit to the head, and then recites the address of Chuck's Donuts.

"You're very close to the hospital," the operator responds. "Can't you take him over yourself?"

Kayley hangs up and says, "We should drive him to the hospital ourselves." Then, watching her mother and sister, she asks, "Aren't we supposed to not, you know, mess with a crime scene?"

And Sothy answers sternly, "We didn't kill him."

Balancing herself against the doughnut display case, Kayley watches the blood dissolve into pink suds of soap that get wiped away by two mops. She thinks about her father. She wants to know whether he ever hit her mother, and, if so, whether her mother ever hit him back, and whether that's the reason her mother so naturally came to the woman's defense. As Tevy wipes away the last trails of blood, she, too, thinks about their father, but she recognizes that even if their father had been violent with their mother it wouldn't answer, fully, any questions concerning her parents' relationship. What concerns Tevy more is the validity of the idea that every Khmer woman—or just every woman—has to deal with someone like their father, and what the outcome is of this patient, or desperate, dealing. Can the act of enduring result in psychic wounds that bleed into a person's thoughts and actions, Tevy wonders, affecting how that person experiences the world? Only Sothy's mind is free right now of her daughters' father. She thinks instead about the woman—whether her swollen eye and bruises will heal completely, whether she has anyone to care for her. Sothy pities the woman. Even though she's afraid that the man will sue her, that the police will not believe her side of the story, she feels grateful that she is not the woman. She understands now, more than ever, how lucky she is to have rid her family of her ex-husband's presence.

Sothy drops her mop back into its yellow bucket. "Let's take him to the hospital."

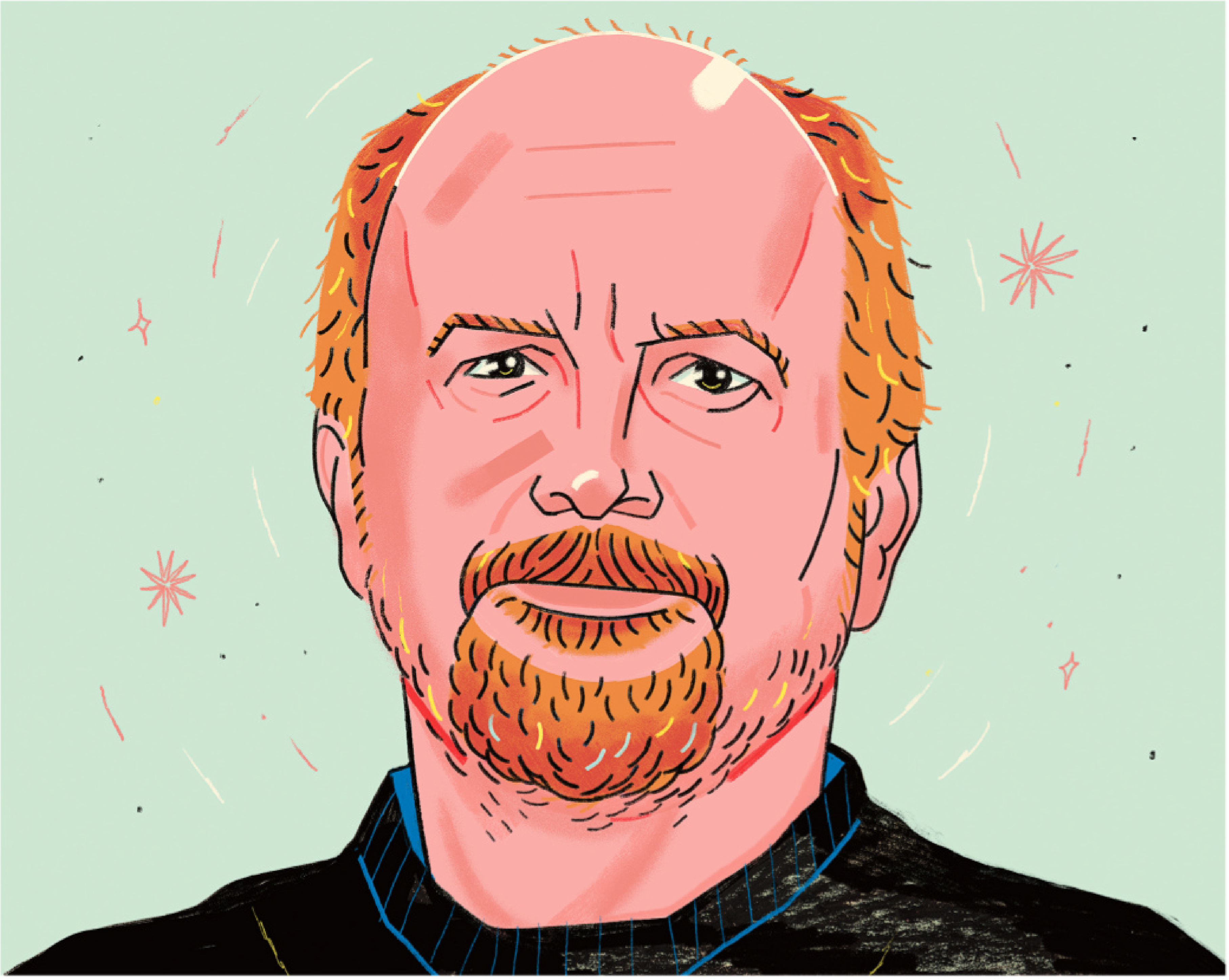
"Everything's gonna be O.K., right?" Kayley asks.

And Tevy responds, "Well, we can't just leave him here."

"Stop fighting and help me," Sothy says, walking over to the man. She carefully lifts him up, then wraps his arm around her shoulders. Tevy and Kayley rush to the man's other side and do the same.

Outside, the street lamp is still broken, but they have grown used to the darkness. Struggling to keep the man upright, they lock the door, roll down the steel shutters, whose existence they'd almost forgotten about, for once securing Chuck's Donuts from the world. Then they drag the man's heavy body toward their parked car. The man, barely conscious, begins to groan. The three women of Chuck's Donuts have a variation of the same thought. This man, they realize, didn't mean much at all to them, lent no greater significance to their pain. They can hardly believe they've wasted so much time wondering about him. Yes, they think, we know this man. We've carried him our whole lives. ♦

THE WRITER'S VOICE PODCAST
Anthony Veasna So reads his story.



ON STAGE

BROS' NIGHT OUT

Louis C.K.'s post-cancellation comeback tour.

BY HILTON ALS

Sometimes, just for fun, I like to reread Norman Mailer's 1957 essay, "The White Negro." In this long, discursive piece, which covers a number of topics, from jazz to orgasms and the threat of atomic destruction, Mailer argues that the only way for a thinking white man to be is black. It's the black guys, he says, who embody a kind of pure existentialism and, thus, an intuitive understanding of the dissonant loneliness at the heart of modern life. No matter what, Negroes *represent:*

> Knowing in the cells of his existence that life was war, nothing but war, the Negro (all exceptions admitted) could rarely afford the sophisticated inhibitions of civilization, and so he kept for his survival the art of the primitive, he lived in the enormous present, he subsisted for his Saturday night kicks, relinquishing the pleasures of the mind for the more obligatory pleasures of the body, and in his music he gave voice to the character and quality of his existence, to his rage and the infinite variations of joy, lust, languor, growl, cramp, pinch, scream, and despair of his orgasm.

Despite the triteness and bungling innocence at the heart of Mailer's approach,

On his first tour since he was accused of sexual misconduct, in 2017, the comedian fails to turn his troubles into art.

ILLUSTRATION BY KELSEY WROTEN

his essay is fascinating to reconsider in this age of "wokeness," when, in all probability, it wouldn't be published at all, given that it involves a white man trying to describe blackness, and isn't that part of the problem? Still, the idea of blackness as a barometer for authenticity has been a subject of debate in American culture since before Elvis sat at Big Mama Thornton's feet. What does black authenticity mean, even to black artists? And when black artists say that a white artist is "down" enough to be black, are they judging by white criteria? Or, in a moment of race shame—*you like whitey*?—trying to justify their attraction to an authentic white artist?

In "Talking Funny," an inert 2011 HBO special, the comedians Ricky Gervais, Chris Rock, Jerry Seinfeld, and Louis Székely, whose professional name is Louis C.K., meet on a denlike set and talk about their work. Mixed in with the predictable bro-dude ribbing are several exchanges that puncture the collegial, competitive atmosphere. At one point, C.K. says, in reference to one of Rock's jokes, that when white people are rich they're rich forever, whereas when a black guy makes money it's a "countdown until he's poor again." They all crack up, and then Rock announces, "This is the blackest white guy I fucking know. And all the negative things we think about black people—" C.K. cuts him off: "You're saying I'm a nigger?" It's a destabilizing moment, and Rock, a little jarred and maybe upstaged, says, "Yes, you are the niggerest fucking white man," before trailing off, as Gervais laughs maniacally and Seinfeld, looking pained, says, "I don't think he can do that. I don't think he has those qualities."

What a comedian can or cannot do onstage or in front of a camera is a compelling question, and one that's being reëxamined as political correctness of all kinds targets the titillating foulness at the root of a lot of standup. Since the days of Pigmeat Markham, not to mention Lenny Bruce, the comedian's job has been to say the unsayable—to give voice to the things that stink or bite us in the heart. And though, early in his career, C.K., who is now fifty-two, did some things that Seinfeld would consider wrong—using the word "nigger" in his act and so on—the title character of his hit show, "Louie," which aired from 2010 to 2015, wasn't unflinchingly transgressive; he was a sexy schlub, open to and part of the emotional diversity of the city. Indeed, that diversity was mirrored in his family. His two daughters looked white, while their mother, his ex-wife, was black. In one episode, Louie even fell in love with a man. That version of Louis C.K. was a storyteller, and the story he told in "Louie" was one that attracted viewers of color, because he didn't seem to see color—he simply responded to individuals in all their sanity or madness with his own sanity or madness. That didn't last, however. At some point in the series, Louie started hanging out with a loud and exhausting woman named Pamela (Pamela Adlon) who—much like C.K. did on "Talking Funny"—punctured her companion's reality by laughing at the idea of his white kids coming out of a "black pussy." Doing so, she robbed viewers of the momentary fantasy that race wasn't a defining aspect of life in America.

The Louis C.K. I saw last month at Yuk Yuk's comedy club on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls, where it seemed I was the only person of color in the audience, was actually two comedians: the Louis C.K. of "Louie," a brilliant observer of the small moments that go unremarked—one bit, for instance, was about his visit to an antique store and his crankiness at the cheery *ting-a-ling* sound made by the bell over the door—and the destabilizing Louis C.K., who can give even Chris Rock pause.

I had never seen him live. But I am interested in performers who try to work through the difficulties in their own lives by addressing them in art. In 2017, five women accused C.K. of sexual misconduct, which, in some cases, involved masturbating in front of them. His current tour—which goes to Houston this week, then to Denver, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and other cities—is the first he's undertaken since then. Before he arrived onstage in the basement-like club, two male comedians came out to warm up the mostly male audience. The jokes, such as they were, focussed primarily on the men's dicks and on the unattractiveness of female genitalia. That kind of routine is not unusual at a comedy club, but I wondered if it had extra weight, given that we were about to see an artist who was, at present, perhaps as famous for his cock as for his art.

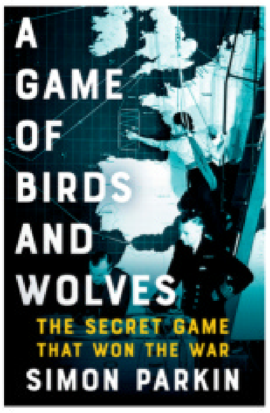
Standup is nothing without grievances, and, in his previous work, C.K. made complaint and anxiety the center of the spectacle. In Niagara Falls, his opening remarks, which referred to the heavily touristed area around the club—"I'm happy to be here, in this room, but I don't know what the fuck is out there. . . . I used to play *arenas*"—were bland and unfunny, but it didn't take long to figure out that his low energy and flat delivery were likely due not just to his not being in an arena but to his need to cater to an audience that was new to him, a male-dominated crowd that showed no sign of finding fault with his dick or what he did with it. Indeed, C.K. spent time on that subject. After what had happened, "I thought I should leave the nation," he said. Big laugh from the audience. "So I went to France. And I had a French girlfriend and we fell in love. Now we're not. Whatever." This got just as big a laugh, because the "whatever" told the audience that C.K. had, to some degree, given up on complications and ambiguity, and that was fine with them. The audience seemed less interested in narrative and nuance than in living out a kind of revenge fantasy against thinking. Attending the show was like looking at a sketch for a drawing. There were figures there, but against what background?

On the subject of his French girlfriend, C.K. told us that she had put a thermometer in her bum to take her temperature—and, when he looked surprised, she'd asked, was this not the way Americans took their temperature? Um, no. A few beats later, he talked about the look a dog gives you when you stick a thermometer up its ass. (Not good.) But what was the point of these jokes? Were they ass jokes or Americans-abroad jokes or something else? Eventually, he asked the audience, "So, do you want to talk about the thing?" He was referring, of course, to the accusations against him. The audience cheered. Somewhat wearily, he said, "I like to jerk off, and I don't like to be alone." More laughter. "So what can I tell you? I can offer you some advice. If you ask, 'Can I jerk off in front of you?'—don't do it! And if they say O.K., don't do it!" The warnings weren't exactly sobering or remorseful; they gestured at his actions without really acknowledging what he'd done or to whom or, more important, why. It was a nod in the direction of his troubles, but with no hard look at what those troubles meant. "Everybody has their thing sexually," he said. "But when everyone knows what your thing is . . . now Obama knows what my thing is. Oh, God."

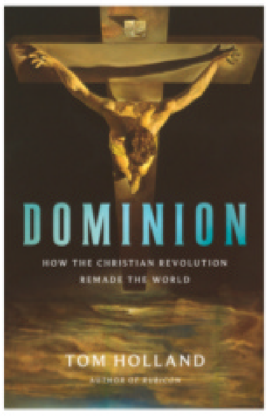
In his previous incarnation as a guy who played arenas, C.K. was tremendously skillful at doing what the best comedians can do: collapse time and identity, be simultaneously themselves and other people and the memory of their former selves. "I was a child pedophile," he said in one of the evening's most interesting bits. "A six-year-old child pedophile, and I'd go up to twelve-year-old boys and be, like, 'What's up?'" It was a fabulous beginning to a story that involved his obsession with a magazine-cover photograph of the teen heartthrob Shaun Cassidy, but—unlike the episode of "Louie" in which Louie falls in love with a man—it soon backed away from the subject, which was perhaps too homo for this crowd, and morphed into a different anecdote, about Cassidy playing a mentally handicapped person and the use of the word "retarded."

As the show went on, I began to want to feed C.K., telepathically, the different forms of storytelling he brought to his work when he was at the top of his game and unafraid of losing out on being loved. What if he were to turn his shame into a story? What if he imagined how his dick looked to a woman he had horrified? Couldn't he go there, Richard Pryor style, and talk from the vantage point of his disgraced penis? Instead, he let his better stories trail off, fearing perhaps the existential ramifications of doing what he used to do, digging and dancing in the minefields of our collective unconscious. At one point, he told us that his mother had died recently. He was genuinely choked up, and then he zeroed in on his grief with an efficiency that was shocking, cold, and fascinating, and asked if we ever wondered how many dicks our mothers had had in their lives. "Wouldn't it be amazing," he said, "if your mom was, like, 'I was with a black guy once. It was hot'?" Then he moved on to something else. But wouldn't it be hot if the new Louis C.K., jettisoning fear and self-consciousness, tapped into his old brain and became his mother, teetering toward that black consort, in love with the American forbidden? ♦

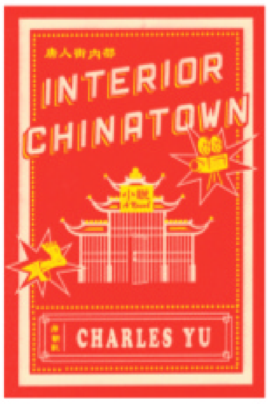
BRIEFLY NOTED



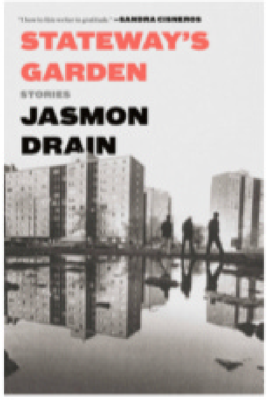
A Game of Birds and Wolves, *by Simon Parkin (Little, Brown).* In 1941, the British Navy faced a seemingly insurmountable threat from the German U-boat fleet, whose "wolfpack" tactics baffled Allied commanders. In this engaging history, Parkin tells how members of the Women's Royal Naval Service, known as Wrens, helped develop a tactical training game that led to a decisive turning point in the war. They brought statistical and mathematical sophistication to their task, turning the floor of their control room into a giant game board and running countless reënactments and hypothetical scenarios. Parkin paints a vivid picture of training sessions in which seasoned sailors chafed at being tutored by "an inexperienced girl," and captures each maneuver in the ensuing sea battles with zeal.



Dominion, *by Tom Holland (Basic Books).* This lively, capacious history of Christianity emphasizes the extent to which the religion still underpins Western liberal values. Holland argues that Christianity is to thank for our belief in the "intrinsic value" of human life and our respect for poverty and suffering. He traces even emphatically secular ideas, such as Marxism, to religious ethics, including brotherhood and equality, and emphasizes Christianity's progressive aspects. St. Catherine of Siena's rejection of an arranged marriage—she claimed that she was betrothed to Christ and, later, that her wedding ring was the foreskin from Christ's circumcision—is seen not as an example of virginal virtue but in quasi-feminist terms, as establishing the idea that "consent, not coercion," is the "proper foundation of a marriage."



Interior Chinatown, *by Charles Yu (Pantheon).* The Asian immigrant experience is rendered as a series of stereotypical roles in a weekly television show in this inventive and entertaining novel. At a Chinese restaurant, the Golden Palace, workers live upstairs and double as extras. The protagonist, Willis Wu, starts off as "Background Oriental Male," later rising to "Generic Asian Man" and "Special Guest Star," on a trajectory that he hopes will take him to the pinnacle of "Kung Fu Guy." Narrated in the second person, with lengthy passages presented in screenplay format, the novel incisively examines the Asian-American reality of "being perpetual foreigners" in the United States, a minority whose story "will never fit into Black and White."



Stateway's Garden, *by Jasmon Drain (Random House).* Linking these stories, set in the era of Reaganomics, is Tracy, a smart kid with a mother "as emotional as the pages of a science textbook," who lives in the Stateway Gardens housing project, in Chicago. From his window, on the fourteenth floor, he can see half the city, and, closer by, the building where a family friend, who has "been through the dismal crevices of the world," shares a place with her aunt, her children, and an ambitious sister. The buildings—a utopian idea that ended in decay and demolition—bear witness to gnawing troubles and quiet revelations: "the brittle taste of whiskey," a boy's chin like "the perfect petal of an orchid," "late-night horn honks . . . as welcome as soft music."

BOOKS

UNCIVIL WARS

How much did Lincoln really matter?

BY ADAM GOPNIK

What are the most misleading, if plausible-seeming, metaphors that afflict our understanding of the world? Some come from incorrectly scaled expectations. There is the idea that the economics of a nation are like those of a household—that debt will strangle you sooner rather than later, and that the national checkbook must be balanced. There's the notion that, because our little lives are ruled by intentions, evolution's larger cycles must reflect them as well: the giraffe has a long neck *in order to* reach the highest branch. A hundred-plus years after Darwin, it remains hard for us to internalize the truth that longer necks arrived through adaptive accident. The most powerful of these seemingly self-evident yet specious metaphors may arise from the leakage of our physical organization into our conceptual categories. Because we have ten fingers, we give far more significance to decades—the fifties were one way; the sixties another—than they ever deserve. (The "sixties" as a continuous cultural period began in 1964, with the Beatles on "The Ed Sullivan Show," and ended, perhaps, in 1989, with the fall of the Berlin Wall to the sound of rock and roll. Centipedes might see such truths more quickly.) And because we have brains at the top of our bodies we are susceptible to the image of a "body politic," where the head's in charge, and the arms and legs and liver do as they're told.

This idea of power simply emanating downward still animates apologetics for authoritarianism, but it also leads to excitement about top-down health-care programs that everyone knows will never be enacted by executive fiat. It inspires, too, the belief that there are "diseases" in the body politic, in need of a cure, rather than a multitude of interests and a plurality of means, always to be kept in balance. If we were jellyfish, blobs of water and nerves, we might realize that political units aren't really like human bodies; they're more like coral reefs, with lots of different kinds of life existing at once, competing and coöperating in complex, multilevel emergent systems. We might realize that we would often be better off worrying about what the appendages in legislatures and localities are doing than about what some ultimate head is thinking, or might be made to think.

Radical Republicans have been recast as moral heroes in America's near-demise.

All these varieties of metaphor, and the confusions they engender, turn out to matter as one reads Fergus M. Bordewich's new book, "Congress at War" (Knopf)—but it is the last that is the most striking. Although the subject of the book is specific, its implications are universal. It is essentially a history of the Civil War, from the Northern side, told by the feet and the arms. Lincoln gets pushed into the background as a largely confused and feeble figure, and the Radical Republicans in Congress take the foreground as the managers of the war and the architects of abolition. Bordewich's book has an aptly pugnacious subtitle: "How Republican Reformers Fought the Civil War, Defied Lincoln, Ended Slavery, and Remade America."

This is popular history of a high order—Bordewich has a terrific eye and ear for the details of his chosen time—and it thoroughly reflects the larger revisionism of our day. As recently as the nineties, Ken Burns's Civil War series told the story of America's near-demise as a tragic conflict of competing values between brothers. Home and hearth and tradition on one side; union and industry and modernity on

ILLUSTRATION BY MATTEO BERTON

the other. Now we see that one set of brothers was fighting to keep still another set in a permanent state of property, to be bought and sold and worked as wanted. The Republicans in Congress, long classed as unreasonable radicals, finally seem like moral heroes.

This was a long time coming. Even in Steven Spielberg's "Lincoln"—with an impeccably progressive Tony Kushner script—Thaddeus Stevens, the Pennsylvania congressman, played by Tommy Lee Jones, was shown as admirable but ornery, a peppery firebrand compared with Lincoln, a character of deep wisdom and soul and Weltschmerz. Bordewich will have none of it. In his account, Lincoln, far from being the steely-minded leader to whom all eyes turned, was a weak temporizer. He meekly endured General George McClellan's rudeness—one night, the egomaniacal but incompetent "young Napoleon" kept Lincoln waiting downstairs in the parlor while he slept—leaving it to Congress to challenge McClellan's insubordination and seeming reluctance to engage in warfare. While Lincoln was still toying with absurd and insulting colonization schemes for freed blacks, Republicans in Congress were insisting on granting them political freedom and giving them guns to fight their oppressors. Lincoln needed a big war but had no plan to pay for it. The Republican legislators, by contrast, found a way to finance the war, by employing an unprecedentedly large-scale sale of government bonds, raising taxes on luxuries, and imposing the first real income tax. Lincoln was a photogenic free rider in a tall hat.

To be sure, the specifically anti-Lincoln polemic subsides as the book proceeds. Bordewich is more concerned with magnifying his Radical Republican heroes than with diminishing old Abe. He has two heroes in particular: Stevens and Senator Ben Wade, of Ohio. It was Wade who led the fight against the "tardy" and soft-on-the-South McClellan, confronting him over his inaction and then urging Lincoln to fire him long before the President got up the courage to do it. Wade increased congressional oversight and helped form the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, which held various uniformed feet to the fire. "For most of the next four years, an invitation to the committee's room . . . was a summons dreaded by defeated generals, timeservers, and corrupt contractors," Bordewich writes. (N.B.: the subpoenaed witnesses don't seem to have had the temerity to resist the summonses.) Wade and the committee became "the driving engine of congressional war policy, prodding and pressuring the president toward more decisive action against slavery and more aggressive military action."

Wade especially hated what he saw as a cozy compact of officers trained at West Point, whose allegiance to the Union, let alone to antislavery causes, he thought shaky. "I am willing to carry on this war until, if it be necessary, the South was reduced to utter desolation," he announced in the Senate. "But not a war run by professional officers." Wade, whose portraits show him as one of the crusty Yankee-Ohio types whom Thurber was still portraying a century later, all spikes and certitudes, was also a snob about Lincoln's antecedents, bluntly calling him "born of poor white trash." Wade advocated mobilizing black regiments in the war and, even after the war, was the loudest voice for a permanent African-American presence in the Army. Ulysses S. Grant would later consider him as a Vice-Presidential candidate but seems to have been disinclined to have someone so combative so close.

If Wade was the motor of a more aggressive warfare, Stevens was the tribune of black emancipation. When McClellan, a stone-cold racist, was opposing any steps toward emancipation, and Lincoln was still dithering, Stevens favored immediately freeing Southern slaves and arming them to fight against their masters. At a time when even abolitionist Northerners, amid memories of Nat Turner, were nervous about black "rapine," Stevens was unequivocal. What, he asked, was to be feared more, "a rebellion of slaves fighting for their liberty, or a rebellion of freemen fighting to murder the nation?" When, as late as August of 1862, Lincoln could say, "If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it," Stevens was consistently forceful about the moral point of the war: "Let the people know that this Government is fighting not only to enforce a sacred compact, but to carry out to final perfection the principles of the Declaration of Independence . . . to strike the chains from four millions of human beings, and create them MEN; to extinguish slavery on this whole continent."

The Stevens-Wade nexus in the House and Senate took advantage of the near-monopoly on power that the Republican Party had—the Southern Democrats having mostly seceded themselves right out of Congress—and reshaped the role of government in ways that proved permanent. If one sees the Civil War as a struggle, in part, between the Jeffersonian small-government, states'-rights strain and the Hamiltonian big-government federal strain in American politics, it's clear how thorough the victory was. The Hamiltonians were the ones who believed in federal management of finances for the good of the whole country, in taxes and bonds, in deliberate, strategic debt, and in far-reaching directed development.

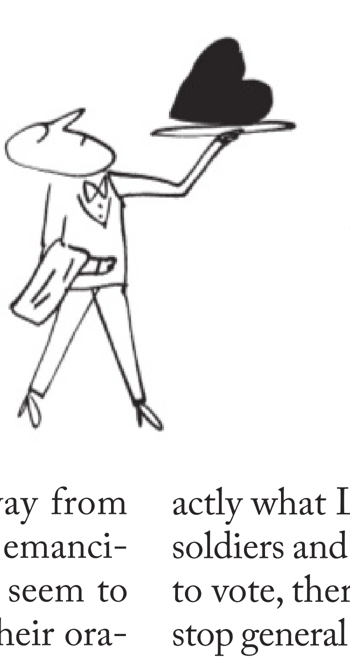
In 1862, in the span of just a few months, the congressional Republicans launched the first comprehensive homesteading plan for settlement in the West, providing land for anyone who would cultivate it; a project to build and support the transcontinental railroad; and a program to create "land grant" colleges—technical and agricultural, though still humanities-teaching, institutions subsidized through grants of land. As has occurred so often in American history, war, or the prospect of it, provided an excuse for national development. (Consider the not very convincing case in the Eisenhower era that national defense against Communism required superhighways through Boston and Philadelphia.) Bordewich refers to the railroad plan, which encouraged companies to build by giving them not just the land for the tracks but much of the land immediately around them, as "hothouse capitalism," but one might as well call it subterranean socialism. Left to themselves, the railroad companies would never have built a fully national system, any more than a private post office would seek to guarantee the delivery of mail to every locality in the country.

The land-grant-college program may have been the most significant accomplishment of the congressional radicals. Over time, the program was almost entirely responsible for the emergence of American "state" universities, and proved, in the end, perhaps the greatest single lever of American prosperity. One recent study demonstrated that the land-grant colleges were key to the country's surge toward economic dominance in the decades after the war.

Was Lincoln, in the end, the dispensable man? Well, no. However effective and even admirable the declarations and initiatives might have been, they needed the President to put them through. Executives execute. Wade pushed for a more aggressive war-making policy, but Lincoln was the one who had to hire and fire the generals. Although he might have acted sooner in several cases, the skills and the deficits of his generals could not have been as apparent to his eyes as they are, retrospectively, to ours. Robert E. Lee himself was reputed to have said, after the war, that McClellan was the best of the Northern generals whom he'd fought. If things had gone only a bit differently, McClellan's tactic of delay might very well have been seen as sound.

Certainly, the best ally the Radical Republicans had in the conflict was Edwin Stanton, the Secretary of War, who shared their views on emancipation and arming freed blacks. But proximity of limb to head mattered: Stanton could act because he was one short breath away from Lincoln. On the question of emancipation, Stevens and his kind seem to us morally superior, and yet their orations and imprecations, however deeply felt, were also safely impotent. These men did not have to be concerned about the effects of their words on the troops the next morning, and on the fiendishly complicated battle-fighting formulas that Lincoln worked on every day. For Lincoln, words had to be weighed for their effect on, say, the citizens and soldiers in West Virginia and Tennessee who were pro-Union but far from abolitionist. Winning an argument and winning a war are two very different things.

More important, Lincoln understood the great truth of liberal-democratic policies: that it is the job of a political leader, in a time of crisis, to make the unthinkable imaginable, for then it will rapidly become possible, and soon essential. Bordewich, failing to grasp this truth, reads Lincoln's words in ways that miss his purposes. He accuses Lincoln of looking past moral concerns when he is actually looking around corners. If you embraced an abolitionist general's local emancipation order in Missouri, you might lose the far greater power of making a general emancipation proclamation later; on the other hand, if you made an emancipation proclamation for only territory under Confederate control, as Lincoln did, it would be perfectly clear to everyone that it was a preamble to a national proclamation. Lincoln had to see what was coming *after* what was coming came.



Bordewich complains that Lincoln's proposed suffrage plan for educated black people and black veterans of the war—the subject of his last speech, delivered from a White House balcony on April 11, 1865—was painfully minimal, and paternalistic at best. He then mentions that John Wilkes Booth had been among those who heard the speech, but he doesn't cite Booth's famous summary of what he had just heard: "That means nigger citizenship. Now, by God, I'll put him through." Booth saw exactly what Lincoln intended: once ex-soldiers and the educated were allowed to vote, there would be no easy way to stop general enfranchisement. Lincoln's words did mean black citizenship, even if, mindful of his opposition, he didn't spell it out. It was not yet *politic* to do so—a term easily dismissed as, but not at all synonymous with, "cynical."

Bordewich—like left revisionists generally—resists a political understanding of Lincoln's political rhetoric. What Booth grasped in a second the revisionists tend to miss at length: that throughout the war Lincoln saw, as great politicians do, that opening the door to radical reform is the hardest part. Once the door is open, history rushes in. Lincoln was not some professional "centrist" politician who happened to find himself in power at the moment a civil war started. He was an antislavery proponent, a single-issue politician who came to power on that issue. He was not the most radical member of his party, but there wasn't any doubt about his objectives. He knew that, as James Oakes explains in his fine book "The Scorpion's Sting," once slavery was confined, it was doomed. To draw a ring around the evil was to end it. John Stuart Mill, the sharpest foreign observer of the contest, grasped this logic perfectly: given the slave-owners' need for new land for the production of cotton, as Mill wrote, one had merely to prevent the spread of slavery, and "the immediate mitigation and ultimate extinction of slavery would be a nearly inevitable and probably rapid consequence."

Lincoln was cagey about this in his speeches precisely because he was clear-headed about ends and means. He had to pull together a coalition to fight one of the most horrific wars mankind had ever fought, which meant persuading Northern people to risk seeing their sons killed and mutilated on behalf of what might seem like an abstract cause. Many could be galvanized by the evils of slavery. But many others could best be convinced with a nationalist agenda (we are fighting for the Union!) or a merely belligerent one (you want those sons of bitches to win?). To assemble the needed coalition, Lincoln had to define a common ground, not push out to the edge of a precipice.

There is a reason, to return to the superintending subject of natural metaphors, that we talk about "assembling a coalition," on the one hand, and "forging an alliance," on the other. An alliance, as between Brits and Soviets in the Second World War, can be created and annealed in an instant by a common threat. A coalition, by contrast, has to be constructed step by step through negotiation and compromise. If Lincoln had started the war as the crusade against slavery that it became, he would likely have had a much harder time recruiting the soldiers in West Virginia and Maryland whom he needed for that crusade. Stevens could be single-minded because he had a single constituency to answer to; Lincoln had to be Argus-eyed because he had so many. Lincoln did not want to win purity awards from abolitionist newspapers. He wanted to win power and to use that power to do what was right.

What would have happened if someone more overtly radical than Lincoln had become President? Would the war, and its aftermath, have gone differently? Counterfactuals usually belong, in fact, on counters—on lunch counters, where people can debate at meaningless leisure. Still, if a Radical Republican like Salmon Chase, or even a Democrat like Edwin Stanton, had been President, McClellan might well have been fired sooner, the Proclamation issued more decisively, and Stevens's advice on the course of the war taken up more readily. On the other hand, the war really was a near-run thing—right up to the 1864 election, in which McClellan campaigned as the Democratic nominee. It wasn't just bad Union leadership that made the South fight so well. A more divisive figure in the White House could have lost Kentucky first and the rest of the North later.

Indeed, though we don't know what would have happened without Lincoln during the war, we know what happened to the Republican coalition immediately after the war, when he vanished with tragic abruptness. It was not good. In this case, the head—Andrew Johnson—was racist and reactionary, while the rump remained radical. As the Unionist political order fragmented, the cause suffered with it. Coalitions that depend on a charismatic figure at their center are easy to mock, and hard to reassemble when they fragment.

Revisionism has its discontents. The conventional wisdom in baseball is that it is much harder to steal second base against a left-hander than against a right-hander, because the left-hander is looking directly at you as you take a lead at first base. The great base stealer Joe Morgan once said, superciliously, that, actually, stealing against a left-hander is easier. Really, what he meant, and what the stats show, is that it is not as hard as you would think. Revisionism is often Morganic in its approach: when people say that slavery was central to capitalism, they don't really mean it, or, if they do, they don't have very convincing evidence that it was—capitalism flourished elsewhere without it. What they do mean, credibly, is that we overlook just how significant slavery was. It's right to say that the Civil War was much less a product of Lincoln's leadership than you might be led to think by the usual accounts—by the Spielberg image of a solitary Lincoln moving alone among wastrel generals and uncomprehending firebrands. It's wrong to say that Lincoln wasn't central.

One of the most significant consequences of the war is one that we often look right past: we can treat the cause of preserving the Union as quaint, or as an alibi for the struggle against slavery, because the North in the end won so decisively that the question of secession has never been seriously raised again. There is no particular national logic to the American arrangement. Local pressures for sovereignty, as in Britain and Canada, might have weighed more heavily in a different history. It is possible to imagine an America in which regional rivalry blossomed into secession and then back into war. California would function just fine as a separate country; so might New York City, on a Venetian or Singaporean model. That few propose this is a sign of how deep a furrow history can dig in a country's consciousness. We are all still the children of Shiloh.

So, all praise to the lawmakers who brought in the rules, paid for the war, built the railroads, and created the colleges. May the names of Wade and Stevens rise from the condescension of posterity to a place of greater fame. Stevens stated the central moral question of slavery and equality sooner than Lincoln did, and Wade saw that the question was meaningless without the means to make the good cause happen. The body politic, after all, may not be the worst metaphor. A good government does need a head to see the way forward. It also needs a heart to make it feel, and a spine to keep it upright. ♦

THE CASHMERE WATCHCAP
A Quality Classic
Well-Made in the U S A
Many More Styles, Colors & Sizes
golightlycashmere.com • (575) 776-8287

ALAN PAINE SWEATERS
V-Neck Lamswool $165
Rounded Lamswool $165
V-Neck Cashmere $375
HUNTER AND COGGINS
ASHEVILLE, NC
1-800-343-9396 jhunts@hunterandcoggins.com
hunterandcoggins.com

Happy Valentine's
Order by 2/12!
Your Anniversary
Immortalized
in Roman Numerals
Crafted from Gold and Platinum
JOHN-CHRISTIAN.COM
OR CALL 888.646.6466

American made. Timeless design.
Nationwide white glove delivery.
Visit our Maine showrooms, or request a complimentary catalog @ chiltons.com.
CHILTON
chiltons.com 866-883-3366
CHILTON FURNITURE CO.

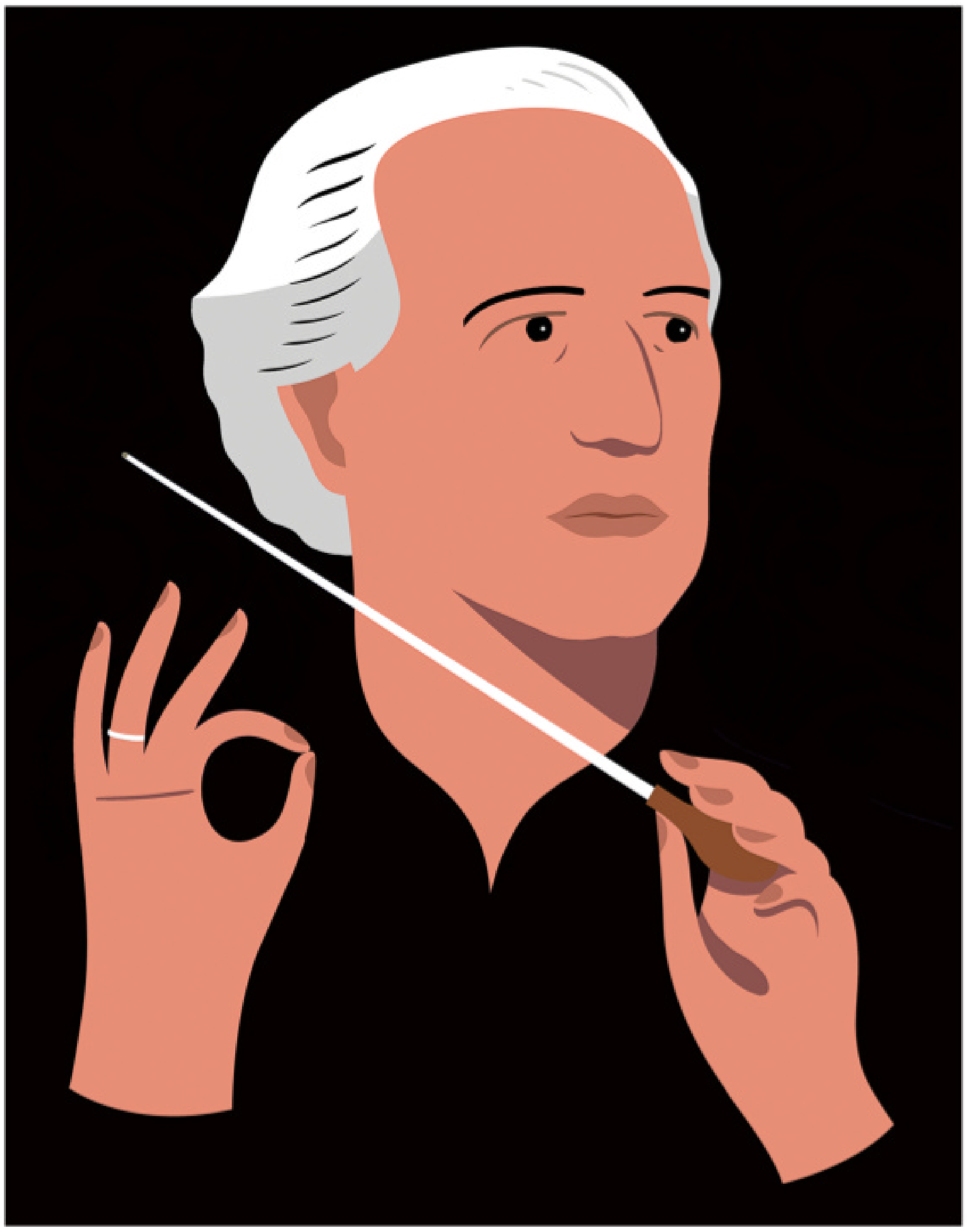
ADVERTISEMENT
WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?
Small space has big rewards.
TO FIND OUT MORE, CONTACT
JILLIAN GENET
305.520.5159
jgenet@zmedia-inc.com

MUSICAL EVENTS

THE CLOSE READ

Manfred Honeck and the Pittsburgh Symphony dig deeper into classic scores.

BY ALEX ROSS



Honeck is known for his ability to revitalize nineteenth-century warhorses.

After listening to the Pittsburgh Symphony's recent recording of the Bruckner Ninth Symphony for the tenth or eleventh time, I began planning a trip to Pittsburgh, in the hope of understanding how such a formidable achievement had come about. The playing is, first of all, at a very high technical level; the Pittsburgh musicians can withstand comparisons with their better-paid counterparts in Boston, New York, and Chicago. Yet note-perfect performances are hardly unusual in an age of impeccable conservatory training. What distinguishes this Bruckner Ninth is the rare and disconcerting expressive power of the interpretation. Savagely precise in detail, and almost scarily sublime in cumulative effect, it gives notice that the right orchestra and the right conductor can unleash unsuspected energies in familiar works.

The right conductor, in this case, is the sixty-one-year-old Austrian maestro Manfred Honeck, who has been Pittsburgh's music director since 2008. Unlike such adventurous contemporaries as Simon Rattle and Esa-Pekka Salonen, Honeck has made his name with nineteenth-century classics. In collaboration with the Reference label, he and the Pittsburgh Symphony have recorded Beethoven's Third, Fifth, and Seventh symphonies, Tchaikovsky's Sixth, Dvořák's Eighth, and other meat-and-potatoes fare. These releases are all worth hearing; some, like the Bruckner Ninth, may become standards by which future efforts are measured. David Allen, writing in the *Times*, is not the only critic to have compared Honeck to Carlos Kleiber, perhaps the most obsessively illuminating conductor of the late twentieth century.

How do Honeck and the Pittsburgh players do it? I wasn't going to uncover any deep secrets during a brief stopover, but a conversation with the conductor and a visit to a couple of rehearsals afforded some clues. Honeck is a sunny-tempered man who grew up in a small alpine town and is devoutly Catholic. His approach to the core Austro-German repertory is informed by a profound knowledge of the traditions from which the music sprang. At the same time, as a former orchestral musician he finds practical solutions to the weighty questions he ponders in the scores. (Before he took up conducting, he was a violist in the Vienna Philharmonic.) Like Kleiber, an idol of his youth, Honeck plies his players with minute instructions, yet his attention to detail is in the service of a cogent musical vision.

In an interview backstage at Heinz Hall, where the orchestra performs, Honeck summed up his philosophy. He told me, "When I do a recording, when I make any kind of performance, I want two things: to show the identity of the orchestra, and to show what I think about the content of the score. I love this quote from Gustav Mahler: 'The most important thing in music is not in the notes.' What is the reason for this music? How can I understand what it means in the time in which it was written, and how can I transport this idea into our own time? With every bar, I have to think, Why? Why a half note here? Why held longer than before? Is it warm? Cold? If I don't ask these questions, it becomes boring, a bad kind of routine."

Honeck likes to tell stories about the music that he conducts. These are not of the clichéd "Fate knocking at the door" variety; they often have to do with regional cultures and rituals. He talks about the different kinds of Austrian and Bavarian Ländler dances, and determines which ones best apply to Bruckner or Mahler. In the Scherzo of Schubert's Ninth Symphony, he hears an echo of

ILLUSTRATION BY AGOSTINO IACURCI

the Schuhplattler dance, in which participants slap the soles of their shoes. In the second movement of Beethoven's Seventh, he pictures a group of pilgrims singing "Sancta Maria." Musicologists may not accept all of these ideas, but scholarly certitude is not the point. The images are plausible and potent, and they help the musicians find focus in their playing. On the Pittsburgh recording of the Seventh, the ostinato rhythm in the second movement takes on a distinctive vocal contour, with changing inflections from one note to the next.

The liner notes to the Reference releases, which are superbly engineered, include lengthy essays by Honeck, in which he lays out his reasoning on an almost bar-by-bar basis. His reading of the Bruckner Ninth as a kind of symphonic Mass—a hidden Miserere text in the first movement, an Agnus Dei in the third, with a demonic Scherzo interceding—goes a long way toward explaining how the recording attains such scouring intensity.

During my visit to Pittsburgh, Honeck was preparing a concert performance of Beethoven's "Fidelio," the version from 1806—the second of three iterations of an eternally problematic opera. Although the final incarnation of the score, from 1814, remains the most dramatically persuasive, the earlier versions, both known as "Leonore," have much to recommend them, particularly in the sometimes riotous inventiveness of Beethoven's orchestration. Honeck told me that he is especially fond of a duet, cut in 1814, in which the characters Leonore and Marzelline are shadowed by a cello and a violin, respectively.

I watched a rehearsal with several of the vocal soloists—Nicole Chevalier sang the title role, and Eric Cutler portrayed Florestan, the heroine's imprisoned husband—and then a run-through of the complete score. Honeck stopped many times to apply his passionate meticulousness. In the scene in which Florestan finds Leonore unconscious, Honeck encouraged Cynthia Koledo DeAlmeida, the orchestra's principal oboe, to play more hesitantly, with groping phrases: "He is insecure. What is happening? Is she dead or alive?" After "*Dort sank sie hin*"—"There she sank down"—an F-sharp dominant seventh in the strings gives way to a G-major triad. Honeck lavished a few minutes on this passing moment, coaxing the strings to let the first chord collapse into the second, without a break. The result was a shiver of Wagnerian Liebestod.

The Pittsburgh recordings are full of such unexpected epiphanies. In the Beethoven Fifth, a work almost impossible to play in a fresh-sounding way, Honeck establishes an explosive tension between the thunderous four-note motto and the sotto-voce dialogue that follows in the strings. In the coda of the first movement, that motto blares forth from a seldom noticed inner voice in the horns, to stunning effect. (This happens at 6:36 on the Reference disk.) A similar juxtaposition of brutality and delicacy lends drama to Bruckner, a composer who is too often treated like a stone-faced monument. The diabolical tendency that Honeck detects in the Ninth's Scherzo is only heightened by passages of Schubertian lyricism and Mendelssohnian sprightliness. The return of the hammering main motif feels all the more apocalyptically abrupt.

No conductor can exercise equal authority in all repertory. Before observing the "Fidelio" rehearsals, I attended a Sunday-matinée concert at which the orchestra played Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra and Ravel's "Boléro," and accompanied the gifted young Korean pianist Seong-Jin Cho in Liszt's Second Concerto. Everything was brilliantly executed, but the concert gravitated toward the kind of standard-issue orchestral virtuosity that Honeck generally avoids. I remember more grit and fire in a rendition of the Bartók that the late Mariss Jansons elicited from this great orchestra in 2000. Honeck periodically leads contemporary music, yet there is no obvious pattern to his explorations.

For the most part, the classical-music world is in need of conductors with broad horizons, who can guide audiences from a passive worship of the past to an active awareness of the present. The rote repetition of Mozart, Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler ultimately does those composers no favors. But we also need conductors who know how to revitalize the grand tradition—and orchestras that can respond in kind. At the moment, Pittsburgh is one of the few places on the international scene where that alchemy regularly happens. ♦

PRICE $8.99
THE
OCT. 24, 2016
NEW YORKER
THE
NEW YORKER

Commemorative Cover Reprints

Search our extensive archive of weekly covers dating back to 1925 and commemorate a milestone with a *New Yorker* cover reprint.

newyorkerstore.com/covers

THE THEATRE

BLOODY HELL

Twists on "Medea" and "Macbeth" reflect modern tragedies.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM

Rose Byrne and Bobby Cannavale play the doomed married couple in "Medea."

By the end of two shows up now—a new "Medea," starring Rose Byrne and Bobby Cannavale, at BAM's Harvey Theatre, and "Mac Beth," adapted from Shakespeare's play and directed by Erica Schmidt, for Red Bull Theatre—the sheer untamable mess onstage might turn your mind toward logistics: Who is going to clean all this up? And how long is it going to take? While both audiences stood to hail the casts, I couldn't help but send thoughts and prayers to the members of the crew.

"Medea"'s set is, at the start, a blank, forbidding white, on the stage floor and both sides of the extended proscenium. The effect is of a huge, three-dimensional whiteboard, waiting for a marker. The background discloses no context of time or place, or any hint of the traumas to come. By the play's end, it's smeared with elemental, ancient stuff: water and ash, the inevitable blood.

The all-female cast of "Mac Beth" makes a glorious physical and aural mulch of the stage at Hunter College's Frederick Loewe Theatre; their adolescent stomps and bangs and splashes often qualify as laugh lines, fully earned. At one point, it rains real water, sprayed from unseen sprinklers near the ceiling—the actors' costumes go translucently soggy, the air in the theatre starts to feel tropical, and the puddles already onstage kick up glugs of water. The floor, which is covered in turf and loose branches, becomes a finger-painted Rorschach; people sitting in the front row get thrillingly splattered as Macbeth's witches boil and bubble.

That's life: the tabula rasa, rarely so clean to begin with, gets quickly soiled. Both productions take "woman"—and maybe even the ideas of gender that encase it—as a category and muddy it up. And, speaking of encasements, they use the familiar thrusts of these two dramas as swaddling clothes for more recent stories plucked from the news, which, in turn, reflect the reality in long-running theatrical archetypes: the blood we keep spilling; the methods of slaughter that roll forward from age to age.

In "Medea," based on Euripides' classic, written and directed by Simon Stone, Anna (Byrne) and Lucas (Cannavale) are a married couple, both scientists by trade, reunited when Anna is released from a mental institution. She was sent there after being caught trying to gradually kill Lucas by slipping trace amounts of poison into his dinner. He'd get violently ill without knowing why, and she'd nurse him in bed as he trembled: a sweet alibi for slow murder. Once confined, she was prescribed a battery of meds and assigned a social worker, who appears throughout the show as a reminder of how, these days, bureaucracy plays at the edges of even our most primal human states. Returned home, Anna is anxious to win Lucas back, but her desire is delusional: this whole cycle started when Anna found a bouquet of sexts—to Clara (Madeline Weinstein), the young daughter of Anna and Lucas's boss, Christopher (Dylan Baker)—on Lucas's phone. Now the furtive lovers live together, and, unbeknownst to Anna, are planning to be married.

The premise is based on the true story of Debora Green, a Kansas City doctor who, in 1995, during a period of marital strife, began drinking heavily, poisoned her husband with ricin derived from castor beans, and burned down the family's house, killing two of their three children. Stone, in an act of clever dramatic architecture, takes this tight knot of a story (the poisoning was revealed only after the arson and the murders) and stretches it into an elegant causal chain.

ILLUSTRATION BY LEONARDO SANTAMARIA

There's a hint of malice in Lucas; Anna mentions in passing that he sometimes hit her as he thrashed around in his sleep. In a moment of sudden intimacy, he seems able to access love only through a flash of violence. This physicality makes Cannavale a natural fit to play him. A solid, surprisingly graceful presence onstage, Cannavale moves like a linebacker with a background in modern dance. Lucas is a huckster—his stratospheric rise as a scientist was achieved by passing off Anna's work as his own. As he struts around in glasses, a chic suit, and expensive-looking boots, Cannavale, whose face flushes red at the first hint of perturbation, makes clear that attention to men's-fashion blogs is no sign of deeper cultivation. Who knows what, beyond the cheating and the intellectual theft, has driven Anna to the deeds that give this story its bloody end?

Lucas and Anna have two sons, Edgar and Gus. For a school project, the boys are making an incredibly poorly timed documentary film about their home life. They scoot across the stage, sticking the camera where it doesn't belong, catching their parents in moments of worry and despair. On a wide screen above the stage, the audience sees what's flowing through the lens. Via closeups, especially on Byrne, we follow the action more as a TV show than as a play.

The advantage of the gimmick is that we see what a subtly soulful comic performer Byrne is (the first time I saw her onscreen was in the great buddy comedy "Bridesmaids"), with a classical clown's range of facial expressions, zinging from doltish, glassy-eyed smiles to devastating droops around the corners of her mouth. Hers is the kind of repertoire that is best picked up by a camera; it's especially interesting to scrutinize her this way given the play's underhum of unease about how women's rage is often medicalized rather than intently engaged: it's fine to watch her closely, but listening is optional.

Unfortunately, the screen saps kinetic force from where it belongs, in the physical space onstage—attentive energy is zero-sum, no matter what the multitaskers tell you—and creates an awkward distance between two forms of acting, filmic and theatrical. The divide does a disservice to both forms, and traps Byrne's performance somewhere in the air above the first row.

The farther along the drama goes, the less Simon depends on the screen for his effects. How liberating for Byrne! The need to face both Lucas and the audience straight on, in the flesh, instead of by visual projection, makes her voice deepen and her physical aspect appear more grave. (Maybe this is the point of the gambit with the screen, and its gradual recession: we go from a dark sitcom to something unfathomably more serious.) Anna feels as real and as horrifying as the evening news, ready to do something she can't undo, make a stain you could never scrub out.

In 2014, two preteen girls lured a classmate into the woods on the pretense of everyday fun, and killed her. They were under the occult influence of a fictional Internet character called Slender Man, and said that they thought they were making a sacrifice that would prove their faithfulness to him. The story inspired Erica Schmidt to put the confounded anguish of "Macbeth" into the mouths of girls. In "Mac Beth," a group of schoolgirls in gray-and-maroon uniforms perform the drama in a junk-strewn forest clearing as a high-concept joke among friends.

Even as it becomes evident that everybody's not quite playing the same game, it's miraculous to see the play split in two, and performed like a duet in tight harmony. Shakespeare's still there, as lucid as ever—Schmidt's poetically choreographed direction affects diction as much as movement, and her actors' speech grows out of fertile symbolic soil, carrying so much meaning. But, as Shakespeare's story unspools, we see the girls trying on poses, finding in words several centuries old a strangely neat container for feelings—libidinal and sisterly at once—that they only faintly knew could be expressed. When Lady Macbeth (an ardent, intelligent Ismenia Mendes) wishes to be "unsexed," and Macduff (Camila Canó-Flaviá), whose role makes her seem prematurely and genuinely doused in grief, declares a need to "feel" her child's death "like a man," we hear these as desires for yet more expressive range, as imagined extensions of what it means to act.

Brittany Bradford is astounding as Macbeth. Her every thought registers first in her body and next in her voice. Meaning ripples across her like waves across a pond. She's got a hard job: she has to be the paranoid Scot and a nervously charismatic kid, an old mask and a naked face, fact and fiction, all at once. She's looking for the kind of control—a fleeting cleanliness—that we all grasp at, and fail to hold on to for long. ♦

THE NEW YORKER IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2020 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A.

VOLUME XCV, NO. 48, February 10, 2020. THE NEW YORKER (ISSN 0028792X) is published weekly (except for four combined issues: February 17 & 24, June 8 & 15, July 6 & 13, and August 3 & 10) by Condé Nast, a division of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. Eric Gillin, chief business officer; Piper Goodspeed, head of brand revenue strategy; James Guilfoyle, executive director of finance and business operations; Fabio B. Bertoni, general counsel. Condé Nast Global: Roger Lynch, chief executive officer; Wolfgang Blau, chief operating officer and president, international; Pamela Drucker Mann, global chief revenue officer and president, U.S. revenue; Anna Wintour, U.S. artistic director and global content advisor; Mike Goss, chief financial officer; Samantha Morgan, chief of staff. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 123242885-RT0001.

POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO THE NEW YORKER, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK ISSUE INQUIRIES: Write to The New Yorker, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, call (800) 825-2510, or e-mail subscriptions@newyorker.com. Give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable, you are dissatisfied with your subscription, you may receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within four weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to The New Yorker, 1 World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For advertising inquiries, e-mail advertising@newyorker.com. For submission guidelines, visit www.newyorker.com. For cover reprints, call (800) 897-8666, or e-mail covers@cartoonbank.com. For permissions and reprint requests, call (212) 630-5656, or e-mail image_licensing@condenast.com. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without the consent of The New Yorker. The New Yorker's name and logo, and the various titles and headings herein, are trademarks of Advance Magazine Publishers Inc. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines, visit www.condenast.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037, or call (800) 825-2510.

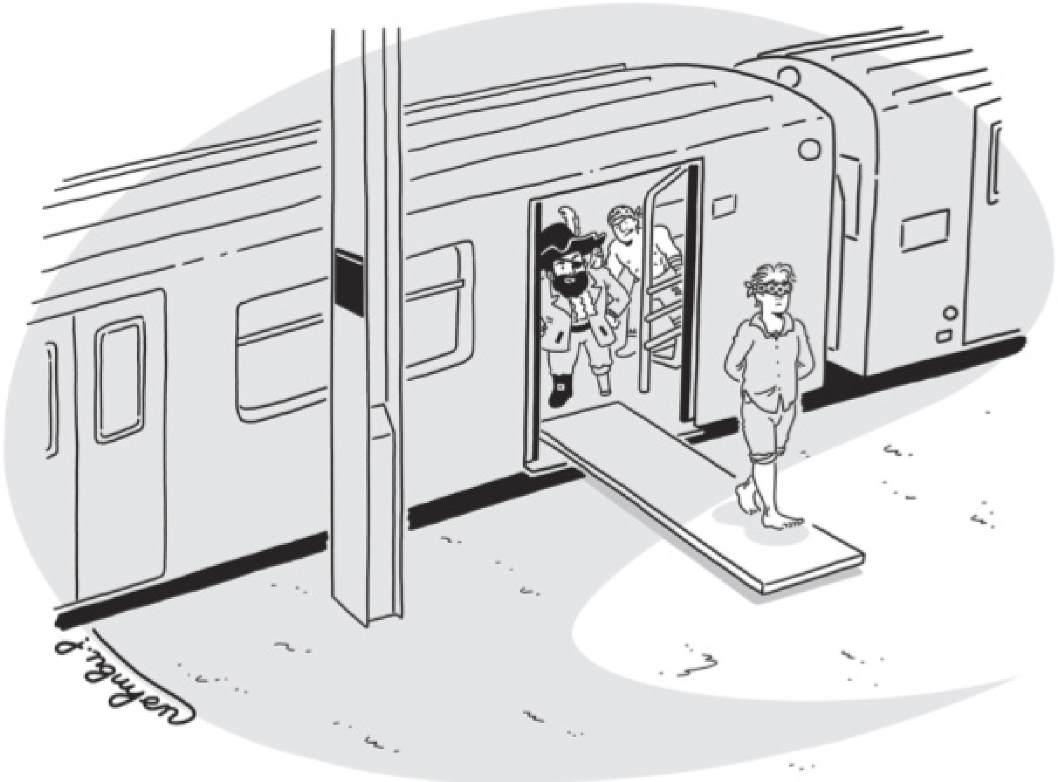
THE NEW YORKER IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ART WORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, ART WORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY THE NEW YORKER IN WRITING.

PLEASE RECYCLE THIS MAGAZINE

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jeremy Nguyen, must be received by Sunday, February 9th. The finalists in the January 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the March 2nd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

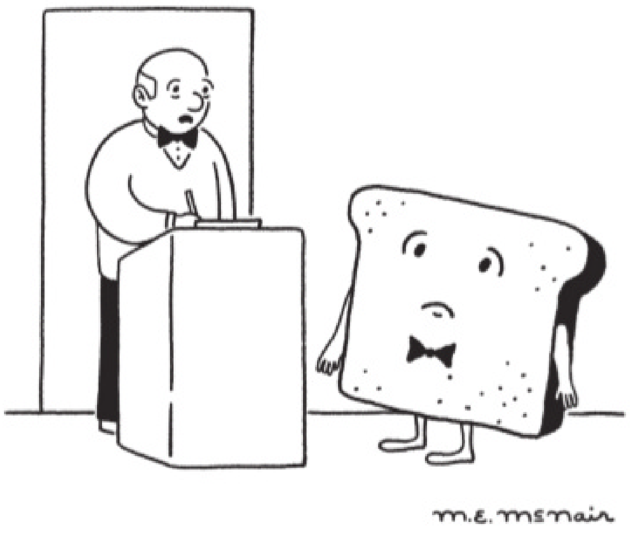
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“ ”

………………………………………………………………………………

THE FINALISTS

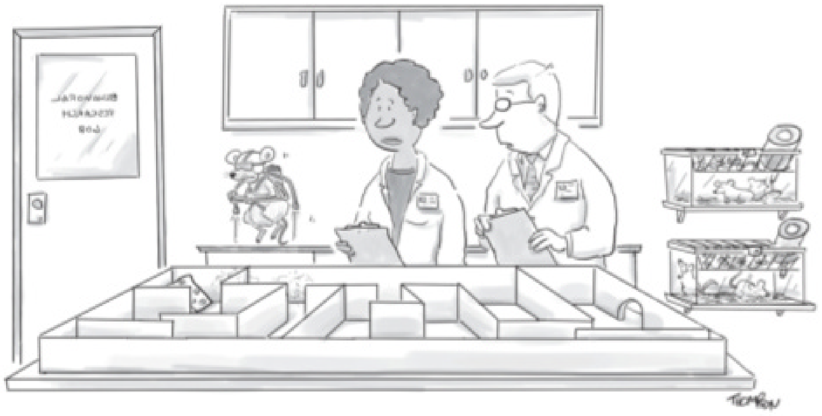


“Yes, we seated a potato, but he had a jacket.”
Richard Berman, Amherst, Mass.

“You're in luck. A slot for you just opened up in our kitchen.”
Sean Kirk, Bellingham, Wash.

“I'm sorry, sir. We no longer serve bread.”
Myles Gordon, Austerlitz, N.Y.

THE WINNING CAPTION



“Let's just give him the damn cheese.”
Michael Lomazow, Riverside, Calif.

PREVIEWS BEGIN MARCH 12!

Flying Over Sunset

A NEW MUSICAL

MUSIC BY
TOM KITT

LYRICS BY
MICHAEL KORIE

BOOK & DIRECTION BY
JAMES LAPINE

LINCOLN CENTER THEATER in association with JACK SHEAR presents FLYING OVER SUNSET book JAMES LAPINE music TOM KITT lyrics MICHAEL KORIE with (in alphabetical order) CARMEN CUSACK HARRY HADDEN-PATON ERIKA HENNINGSEN JEREMY KUSHNIER EMILY PYNENBURG MICHELE RAGUSA ROBERT SELLA LAURA SHOOP ATTICUS WARE TONY YAZBECK sets BEOWULF BORITT costumes TONI-LESLIE JAMES lighting BRADLEY KING sound DAN MOSES SCHREIER projections 59 PRODUCTIONS orchestrations MICHAEL STAROBIN casting TELSEY + CO production stage manager RICK STEIGER music direction KIMBERLY GRIGSBY choreography MICHELLE DORRANCE direction JAMES LAPINE

LINCOLN CENTER THEATER

Telecharge.com • 212-239-6200 • Groups: 212-889-4300 • FlyingOverSunset.com

FLYING OVER SUNSET is supported by a generous grant from the New York Community Trust – Mary P. Oenslager Foundation Fund.
Special thanks to the Harold & Mimi Steinberg Charitable Trust for supporting new American work at LCT.

OFFICIAL AIRLINE
American Airlines